LIFE AND DEATH IN THE FIELD: FARMER SUICIDE AND THE NECESSITY TO FEED

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Farmer suicide is at crisis levels in the United States and India. This crisis is both a problem of experiential knowledge within infrastructure as well as a problem of discourse power. I argue that the logical abstraction required to conceptualize and evaluate farmer suicide cannot be separated from the overall experience of farmer suicide. Rather than existing as distinctly separate phenomena, these elements are co-constitutive. Despite the Centers' for Disease Control identification and designation of farmer suicide as complex, statistically relevant, and elevated, nearly all the policy efforts addressing farmer suicide focus on narrow economic impact and narrow economic relief. While these economic vectors are important, the problem is multifaceted and requires a broadening of policy discourse to include additional factors (e.g. philosophical, existential, psychological, etc.). Using Hannah Arendt's work on politics and the human condition, I connect the conditionality of *homo faber* (human fabricator/maker), *animal laborans* (laboring animal), and *vita activa* (active life) with farmer struggle and suicide. Through the work of Georges Canguilhem and Achille Mbembe, I critique and analyze the predominant discourse and framing of suicide as a disease. Last, but not least, I propose decolonial theory and degrowth theory as viable critical pathways to shift the scale of farming infrastructure towards a more equitable and just future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to both my academic and ancestral family. To my wife, who has been eternally patient and supportive of me, I am forever grateful. To my father, mother, stepfather, stepmother, sister, and in-laws, all of you helped me to remain sane while writing a dissertation in the middle of a global pandemic, civil unrest, and uncertain times. I consider myself extremely fortunate to be surrounded by so much love. This writing is more than an appeal to human decency, cooperation, and compassionate understanding. It is a piece of my soul.

To Irene Klaver, without your guidance and unwavering encouragement, this dissertation would not have been possible in the first place let alone finished. To Adam Briggle and Barbara Muraca, I appreciate your continued dedication to colleagues around the globe, regardless of their position, creed, gender, age, ethnicity, etc. You have demonstrated compassion and care towards my well-being in a way that is truly special. To all other colleagues, mentors, coffee shop interlocutors, and students, I will forever cherish our philosophical conversations and debates. Open critical dialogue and the willingness to listen are the cornerstones of academic excellence.

Last, to the farmers both in the United States and India, I would like to thank you for all of the work done and inspiring perseverance, both past and present. To my forebear, Bernt Størkerson Opoien, your tremendous courage and sacrifice immigrating to the United States as a farmer exemplifies the dream that so many people wish to see realized. Farmers have been mistreated and neglected by society for far too long, and this dissertation is but one of many steps in the right direction to remedy such mistreatment and neglect.

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

Why do farmers kill themselves? Farmer suicide is an international phenomenon and one that is not responding well to current policy efforts.[1] While it is true that farming has always been a difficult profession, suicide levels are reaching new degrees of severity.[2] In the United States, this increase in farmer suicide is most clearly seen in the Midwest, although it is also occurring elsewhere.[3] In India, farmer suicide is also nationwide.

To answer this question, I explore the following thesis and philosophical position: every empirical manifestation of suicide maintains an axiological concept of suicide. It is the formal and demonstrable aim of this work to illuminate the crisis of suicide among farmers and to provide discourse that includes the philosophical-existential situatedness of these individuals in addition to other contributing factors.

For, to miss experiential valuation of suicide and its inter/intra relationships is to miss an essential piece of the conceptual basis for and theoretical interactivity of suicide. This dissertation avoids the language of "committing" suicide, as this particular language temporally oversimplifies the existential import of such an event to mere moments. The conditions leading up to such a grave moment are the focus rather than the singular act of ending one's life. Struggling farmers are not receiving enough attention regarding this dynamic. Instead, policymakers avoid such a crisis of life and death, chalking up cases of suicide as if such conditions are outliers and of little regard, compared to the utilitarian importance of mega-scale

[1] Hogan, Anthony et al. "Ruptured Identity of Male Farmers: Subjective Crisis and the Risk of Suicide." *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* 27, no. 3 (2012): 118-120.

[2] Weingarten, Debbie. "Why are America's farmers killing themselves?" *The Guardian*. 11 December 2018. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/06/why-are-americas-farmers-killing-themselves-in-record-numbers.

[3] Wedell, Katie and Sherman, Lucille. "Farmer suicide deaths alarm rural communities in the Midwest." *South Bend Tribune*. 7 March 2020. Available from: https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/news/2020/03/07/farmer-suicide-deaths-alarm-rural-communities-in-the-midwes/43905301/.

manufacturing. Farmer suicide is not collateral damage; its conditions are enmeshed in the globalizing farming infrastructure itself.

This avoidance is twofold: once to stave off death and twice to stave off those consigned to death. Suicide presents as a "tragedy," "a matter of poverty," or some other oversimplification of political struggle. This view manifests in a formulation of assumed, readily apparent knowledge and thus understood as put to rest, as those who take their own lives are put to rest (that is to say, so seemingly apparent that such information is assumed unworthy of analysis and critique outside of traditional psychological circles). We can see as much with a cursory glance at the common language surrounding suicide. One does not often hear of the conditions of suicide, experience them, breathe them, bathe in them, taste them, etc. Rather the common framing is one of singular transgression, as one might commit a crime. The assumption is that suicide exists as a linear threat, to be held at bay as one might a hurricane with makeshift levees.

The simultaneous and peculiar cultural willingness to leave suicide alone, on the one hand, and peculiar unwillingness to leave suicide alone, on the other, provoked me to investigate further into the matter! In this vein, there are few perennial issues that press both as subtly and aggressively as suicide. It is a "problem" all the more sinister compared to the positions of radical terrorism, pandemics, and the like. Radical terrorism, pandemics, etc. are culturally foregrounded, regularly and with great brushstrokes, whereas suicide often is not. Many farmers suffer in hushed tones, without the theatrical grandeur of tomahawk cruise missiles in the Middle East or the Wall Street collapse from a global COVID-19 pandemic.

Above, the problem is placed in quotations because problems are sociopolitical in their nature and operation. This sociopolitical element opens the way to a metacritique of problems themselves and, in short, a dissolving of any kind of objective innocence attached to the word.

This discourse of problems has suggested and carried semiotic assumptions of impending solution(s) in which said problems are considered solved. In the western hemisphere, these solutions contain axiological assumptions aligning with Cartesian views of efficiency (i.e., the shortest direct distance between two points). Rather than this linear conceptualization of problem and its relationship to problem solving, this dissertation favors problematics of suicide that beckon remedies and indirect, complex perennial resolutions over simple, linear solutions.

In this sense, suicide is a problem that can never be completely solved. This work does not aim to stamp and seal this conversation. Instead, this work aims to provide a more inclusive and complex view of suicide as a philosophical issue, using farming communities as a case study. Philosophers are in a unique position to help in this regard and need to inter-personalize once again, as political philosopher Hannah Arendt did with the political,[4] that problems too reside between people with complex lived realities and not in a disconnected logical space of objectivity. In short, this problem of suicide is multidimensional. Problems are not simply matters of task elimination; they are also often matters of community comprehension.

Illuminating the crisis requires *comprehension* of the infrastructural atmosphere of farmer suicide issues. By this, I mean a particular kind of comprehension, as Arendt states in the 1967 preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,

> Comprehension, however, does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden that events have placed upon us—neither denying their existence nor submitting meekly to their weight as though everything that in fact happened could not have happened otherwise. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be or might have been.[5]

[4] Arendt, Hannah. *The Promise of Politics*. New York: Random House, Inc., [1995] 2007. pp. 93-200. There is more on this conceptualization of politics in the following chapters.

[5] Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Publishing Company, [1951] 1985. p. xiv.

So, comprehension entails living among the messy details and complex political struggle. It is a call to critical attention that resists the totalizing, homogenizing nature of various systems and also provides one with an active context of analysis rather than a passive context of analysis. The tone of this work follows Arendt's words. Suicide statistical data, production concerns, policy documents, and logical pathways are all included in analysis of this farmer suicide problem. Entwined with these are illustrations for a greater existential awareness of farmer suicide that attempts to resist the systematic abstraction of this phenomenon.

Within this framing, comprehension serves a purpose beyond mere rational understanding or logical cogency. It is not sufficient to simply provide good philosophical arguments among evidence in support of analysis. Work on problems related to the human condition also make an appeal to ideals connected to emotional investment and value, like freedom, liberty, sovereignty, and social connectivity. Appeals to freedom, liberty, sovereignty, and social connectivity allow for the flourishing of the human subject among a world of objects, consumed by way of their instrumentation.

In ethical terms, the "wicked problems" of our day can be quite maddening and heart-wrenching. That is, some problems are so encompassing, threatening, and expansive that these problems have no clear solutions or direction for action.[6] The disorientating nature and scope of suicide surely fits the bill. This disorientation need not dissuade philosophical investigation. On

[6] Rittel, Horst W.J. and Webber, Melvin M. "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning." *Policy Sciences* 4, 1973 pp. 160-1. For Rittel and Webber, most policy issues end up confronting a wicked problem, or even becoming a wicked problem, in their course of practice. Additional authors have even suggested "super wicked" problems as a further category. However, I do not find this "super wicked" distinction fruitful, as it does not seem to substantially distance itself from wicked problems in a way that is more helpful. It would be as if one were to distinguish between "infinity" and "infinity + 1." One term is already incomprehensibly large by itself when applied to our lived reality. For information on the further distinction between wicked problems and super wicked problems, see Levin et al. "Playing It Forward: Path Dependency, Progressive Incrementalism, and the 'Super Wicked' Problem of Global Climate Change." Paper presented at International Studies Association Convention, Chicago, Il, February 28th – March 3. 2007.

the contrary, it is the primary cause of such my investigation. Where can one begin with inquiry? We can always address wicked problems by illuminating moments of ambiguity and confusion, not to simplify and reduce such moments but to immerse oneself in their complexities and layers. One need not chalk suicide up to the unknown and unknowable or to the unsensed and unsensible as a result of its vast scope and complexity. Philosophy has much to offer in this space of illumination, to which it has said surprisingly little thus far compared to other disciplines.[7] To discuss what makes life philosophically worth living, and the myriad of challenges accompanied by such a discussion, is to open oneself to some of the most fundamental pieces of human experience and existence.

In the cases of Northern India and the Midwestern United States, farmers are experiencing such a crisis in the "problem" of life and death, of struggle and sustenance, and reasons to keep living. These concerns regularly struggle with policy efforts that frame suicide in terms of an impoverished notion of an economy of loss, in the best case, or in placating constituent complaints, in the worst case.[8] Here, best case and worst case are a gesture towards a spectrum of possible framings and perspectives of farmer suicide.

Despite their shortcomings, at least economies of loss are open to critical insight and inquiry into the parameters of what constitutes "loss," albeit superficially. The dairy industry lost such-and-such dairy volume this year to oversupply, the sugarcane lost such-and-such yield in western India to flooding, or the wine industry lost such-and-such yield to California fires. In these examples, there is certainly less product, this much is clear. Various media and academic

[7] Here, I am thinking specifically of clinical psychology and pharmacology, which are both quite apt at addressing *techne* and *psyche* as they relate to suicide. *Philos* can be included in this grouping.

[8] While policy certainly has its limitations, this point is illustrative of a particular kind of policy that this work critiques later.

outlets will often follow-up on circumstances such as these by commenting on the "struggle" or the "suffering" of the system, economy, etc.

When I speak of economy, it is an economy that can take two forms. The first form is a narrower sense of economy and tends to follow traditional models for measuring capital, money, funds transfers, etc. The second form is a broader sense of economy to include transactions of ideas, knowledge, logical strands, cultural capital, cultural import, etc. The history of farmer suicide privileges the first sense, without qualification. In areas where I have not specified whether economy is narrow or broad, this is because the distinction may be too ambiguous in its context.

These kinds of statements are, at their core, utilitarian. It is the consequence of *homo faber* (human as maker/fabricator) and *animal laborans* (human as biological survivor) caught in a wrestling match. Hannah Arendt highlights this utilitarian dynamic in a section of *The Human Condition* in which she states,

> What pain and pleasure, fear and desire, are actually supposed to achieve in all these systems is not happiness at all but the promotion of individual life or a guaranty of the survival of mankind. If modern egoism were the ruthless search for pleasure (called happiness) it pretends to be, it would not lack what in all truly hedonistic systems is an indispensable element of argumentation—a radical justification of suicide. This lack alone indicates that in fact we deal here with life philosophy in its most vulgar and least critical form. In the last resort, it is always life itself which is the supreme standard to which everything else is referred, and the interests of the individual as well as the interests of mankind are always equated with individual life or the life of the species as though it were a matter of course that life is the highest good.[9]

As such, those in charge of the political machinery of the farming industry are still in this modern egoism to which Arendt refers. Farmers hear that they are required to provide while the system that they provide for does not reciprocate meaningful support. This forces a great many

[9] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. pp. 311-12.

farmers into accepting mega-scale factory farming methods in order to keep up with near impossible demand figures. This bind is one of many factors increasing farmer suicide rates in the United States and India.

Simple constituent placation is a type of thoughtless political activity for which there can be little to no lasting dialogue. In terms of policy making, farmers and the farming infrastructure are at a breaking point. Economic assistance is not enough. I suggest that we can aim the bar of praxis higher at the policy level, not only towards economic prosperity but towards reasons to existentially and physically thrive.[10] Here, I mean thriving in terms of fulfillment, sense of purpose, and overall happiness as components to virtues.[11] While I am cautious to assign number values to any of these indirect measures, local narratives of farmers can serve a similar function as numerical data sets in order to support such an argument for fulfillment.[12]

As such, this work is heavily indebted to a few specific philosophical traditions. I owe a great deal to the historical influences and lineages of phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Mikel Dufrenne.[13] Without their groundbreaking work in the subject matter of biases, critiques of subjectivity and objectivity, and aesthetic contributions in

[10] Here, I am using praxis not as an activity done by free people, as the Ancient Greeks would have it, but rather as a doing between thinking and action that necessitates simultaneous theory and practice.

[11] This thriving is similar to, but not altogether representative of, Ancient Greek notions of *eudaimonia*. As an additional note, sense of purpose and overall happiness are virtues divorced from Immanuel Kant's deontological framework. The work of this paper does not engage with Kantian metaphysics or moral structures, as Kantian metaphysics or moral structures do not seriously consider those persons who may have limited or revoked moral autonomy. As such, historically subjugated people of colonized lands do not mesh well with the practical fruits of Kant's theoretical frameworks. Farmers in India have this sort of colonization history that falls into consideration, as do indigenous people in the Midwestern United States.

[12] While instrumentalizing concepts like fulfillment, sense of purpose, or overall happiness can occasionally prove useful, reifying these concepts often leads to objectification of the subject and the reduction of experience to mechanics. The overwhelming majority of policy and socioeconomic work on suicide relies too heavily on this mechanistic discourse, resulting in a practical myopathy where farmers and suicide are concerned.

[13] Specifically, Husserl's *Ideas I*, Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, and Dufrenne's *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* capture these notions and critiques of biases, subjectivity, and objectivity most completely.

interpretation, this work would greatly lack the vocabulary necessary to navigate "perspectives of farmer suicide," as I would have it. As a brief disclaimer, this work is not situating itself firmly within the traditions of these authors but does borrow heavily, albeit indirectly, from their shared insight: empirical perception and rational knowledge intimately and continually co-constitute one another, a co-constitution of which embodied experience is a crucial factor.

This key phenomenological insight, paired with critiques of the so-called objectivity of science to communicate truth,[14] form a few of the underpinnings of the work of this piece. The notion of a perfectly distanced observer of truth (like that found in Adam Smith's infamous "impartial spectator," for example) forces one to table the desires, values, motives, and situated perspective of the truth-seeker.[15] This distanced objectivity is neither theoretically possible, nor practical. Truth, as it performs and exists, is contextual. There are basic lexical building blocks that each culture points towards; however, these building blocks can be used to create a great deal many different kinds of truth downstream, so to speak. This realization about truth does not necessitate a rejection of meaning or a severance of coherent communication. Furthermore, this contextualization includes one's positionality in such an inquiry and comes to terms with the fact that axiology and presentation/representation are closely associated with one another. Both the form and content of value are intertwined. So, the truth of the problem of farmer suicide begins with the fact that such a truth is plural and complex.

[14] Here, I am speaking narrowly, of a technoscientific push characterized by the last 200 years or so. The industrial revolution fundamentally changed some of the rules to conducting "true" scientific work. These rule shifts, such as pairing efficient thinking with efficient production, limit the relevancy of science in its older form as a general system of inquiry.

[15] Such was the position of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological reduction, *epoché*, found in *Ideas I*. This motion by Husserl is critical of the unquestioned assumptions connected to living in the world, one of which is one's positionality in such a world as a phenomenologist and/or scientist. In order to perform phenomenology successfully, it is necessary to separate oneself from both scientific and psychological framing.

Second, I am indebted to Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault's work on political matters, power, labour, work, action, revolution, and discipline. Both of these authors wrote and spoke on the intersection and inseparability between the "mere facts" of everyday life and the power/institutional structures that sustain these facts. In this vein, particular knowledge and particular ways of arriving at this knowledge situate, interstitially, within political power relationships and institutional structures. History, as an objective and disinterested view of the world, is an impossibility. By inclusion, the same perspectival point holds true for the current reality and history of the western agricultural industry. Forces like colonialism and imperialism live on via institutional structures, even though the beaches of India, Egypt, Algeria, etc. may be quiet of the foot-soldier invasions of colonial past. I have much to say about this point in the latter part of this work.

Lastly, I am indebted to the work of Mahatma Gandhi. There are many valuable philosophical works that have come from and currently come from scholars directly connected with India (some of which are included in the following chapters of this work's analysis). In particular, Gandhi's work on self-organizing systems of governance and living, freedom, and resistance to colonial pressures are essential to incorporating subject matter concerning Indian citizens. I take a moment to delineate a necessary distinction between the "West's Gandhi" and Gandhi as he operated in India.[16] It is indeed impossible to arrive at the true Gandhi, as it were, as one could never include enough information to fully encapsulate the views of this thinker.

Western presentations of Gandhi often dilute the potent and widespread critical attitude

[16] Lal, Vinay. "Gandhi's West, the West's Gandhi." *New Literary History* 40:2 (2009): 281-313. Lal is quick to point out that Gandhi, as figurehead, is often an image projected by the West to maintain a particular portrayal of Gandhi's work (reductively in this case, as approachable and Western-rational). It is also important to acknowledge both Gandhi's widespread critical attitude towards all things "modern" as well as his categorical repudiation of Western colonialism and industrialization in all of its forms. While Gandhi was in full support of civil disobedience, his aggressive policy stances can also be maintained.

that he openly held towards all things industrialized. While it is not the purpose or scope of this work to investigate the chosen portrayal and politics of Gandhi's image, we necessarily receive only a partial view of such an individual's commitments and lived experiences. While Gandhi's holism can be quite helpful in resolving some particular issues of western industrialization (like protecting forests from massive industrial clearing via narratives of connectedness with nature), I caution buying into his system *en bloc* simply because it attempts to forge positive connectivity among organisms.[17]

The subsequent sections of this work contain subject matter as follows. Chapters 1 and 2 highlight philosophical and conceptual framing to the dissertation. This includes a brief synopsis of the "state of affairs" of farmer suicide. This chapter is also specific in how this dissertation philosophically investigates suicide and the sociohistorical *milieu* that mandates this framing. I also explain the historical relevance and lineage of the current dominant ethical paradigm in the United States.

The reasoning for this is simple and straightforward. There is a particular way, historically speaking, of conducting ethical discourse and (re)inforcing norms in the United States. In this fashion, the logical formal character of ethics and norms blends with the action and policy resulting from these norms.[18] The two cannot be neatly separated from one another. Colonial concerns of the past have survived and live on through institutionalized infrastructures. Globalizing industrial pressures, such as those in the western agricultural industry, have adopted and imposed this particular way of thinking about ethics and norms on farming communities

[17] This claim is supported, in detail, in Chapter 3.

[18] More specifically, this chapter uses Hannah Arendt's reading of the public and private as an analogue for discussing the practical and theoretical blending of ethics and norms. In turn, Arendt's process are mapped onto industrialized agriculture policies and suicide studies as an analysis tool.

beyond the geography of the western part of the world, in this case in India.

Chapter 2 examines specific agricultural, suicide, and farming crises in the United States. It shows the philosophical-existential situatedness of farmers in addition to economic, productive, and social markers of their livelihoods. This includes the historicity and widespread use of financial credit in the United States, the contemporary and implicit agricultural buy-in to exploitative large-scale farming infrastructures, and industrialized models for efficiency and production. Because of its prevalence, suicide has been labeled an "epidemic." This choice in discourse has political consequences for farmers, and the label of an epidemic limits realistic policy options for addressing this issue. Myths of progress, industrialization, traditional farming methods, and development are the primary foci. If farmers may experience any kind of lasting relief, the infrastructural farming system needs to change. The current system is unsustainable on many levels.

Chapter 3 performs a similar exercise to the previous chapter, except that the subject matter is India. Many of India's regions share similar climate concerns with the United States in addition to its structural and existential issues. Until around 2016, the Indian government did not offer any substantial assistance programs for its struggling farmers.[19] Since then, some governmental aid was instantiated and extended to those in need, although it was markedly minimal considering the circumstances. Some preliminary reports indicate that suicide numbers among farmers have leveled out, for the time being. Professional forecasting models have been

[19] Carleton, Tamma A. "Crop-damaging temperatures increase suicide rates in India." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 114:33 (2017) p. 8746. Indian governmental influence has selectively framed farmer suicide issues in terms of economic disparity and initiated a $1.3 Billion climate-based crop-insurance scheme. Carleton's findings suggest that climate temperature increase plays a pivotal role in increased suicide prevalence. The degree to which economic hardship plays a role in suicides in India is overly simplified. Although Carleton's acceptance of "developing countries" at face value should be critiqued for its colonial normativity, it is important that this article complexifies the situation of farmers who experience hardship and suicide beyond merely the economic aspects of the crisis.

unsuccessful in predicting farmer suicide under the present conditions.

The Indian government, as well as many academic researchers, have pigeon-holed farmer suicide's causation in India as an economic concern among minority groups. The logical reasoning for this reduction is unclear. Suicide's existential dwelling entails a much larger domain than whether we can balance our ledgers at the end of the month. The same themes from the previous chapter of progress, industrialization, traditional farming methods, and development are addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 examines the relationships that industrialization, efficiency, and agriculture have with traditional models for understanding cures and diseases. Many regions of the world, including the United States, treat suicide as a kind of pathology. Common language in this regard includes the "epidemic" of suicide. I do not find the prevailing medical vocabulary of physiological cures and diseases helpful in discussing remedies for suicide or the existential import of suicide, despite pathology's authoritative voice in the scientific and medical communities. So, this chapter is not making a nosological categorization of suicide. Rather, it is suggesting a paradigm shift for understanding the atmosphere of suicide that is away from pathology and towards suicide as a complex sociopolitical phenomenon. This paradigm shift, in turn, suggests a primacy of logic and ethics.

Chapter 5 presents decolonial and degrowth alternative perspectives as remedies to some of farmer suicide's problems and farming infrastructure. As well as providing recommendations, this chapter serves to synthesize the arguments of the rest of this work. The subversive character of decolonial and degrowth scholarship helps to critique and dismantle the conceptual and literal machinery of contemporary western agricultural infrastructure. Western agricultural infrastructure is not detrimental by virtue of being western. It is detrimental because of its formal

composition and logical infrastructural pathways that obscure the conditionality of suicide as it relates to community comprehension.

As it currently stands, the majority of the western agricultural industry imposes its infrastructure, both theoretically and practically, as a "top down" model. Both decolonial and degrowth thinking emphasize the foil of this hierarchy, instead favoring "bottom up" theory and practice. Here, I also discuss the theoretical limitations of decolonial and degrowth perspectives on suicide as they relate to academic inquiry in general.

It is common for traditional western philosophy to distance itself from emotion and experience in favor of logical clarity, simplicity, and direct communication. So too, philosophy has tended to draw divisive lines between knowledge and power. As Michel Foucault notes in *Discipline and Punish*, philosophy has spoken of knowledge as if it is only formed when power relations are suspended. Rather, power and knowledge directly imply one another.[20] The same is true as the knowledge and power of farmers relate to the knowledge and power of agricultural infrastructure pathways. As such, an investigation into historical forces, politics, and existential struggle is also an investigation into knowledge relationships.

The forms of seemingly uninterrupted continuity that people accept as part of everyday life, without question, must be upended. I say this not as a call to outright revolution but as a call to greater critical engagement. These forms of continuity in daily life do not arrive naturally and are not sustained naturally.[21] In this way, the composition of seemingly mundane things is often a series of complex layers. The inner workings and logics of agricultural infrastructure, taken as

[20] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, Inc., [1977] 1995, pp. 27-8.

[21] Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And The Discourse of Language*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Random House, Inc., [1972] 2010. p. 25.

granted, need to fall under critical, philosophical light to expose their moments of rupture and discontinuity.

It is time to revisit the relationships between these philosophical elements and bridge the gaps between them in service of a more understanding and compassionate future. As a final introductory note, this dissertation provides inquiry and broadens discourse on suicide in such a way as to engage both the logical and experiential fields of farmer suicide.

CHAPTER 1

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE FIELD

> *There is but one truly philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest...comes afterwards*.
>
> Albert Camus

Every empirical manifestation of suicide maintains an axiological concept of suicide. Too commonly, philosophers take the will to live as a natural precondition to philosophical inquiry. "To live" is channeled through the lens of biological/genetic determinism, often in a reformulation of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory (i.e., in terms of biological/genetic replication, physiological processes, niche viability, perseverance through struggle, etc.) This framing assumes an element of linear progression and necessitates a dichotomy of improvement/obsolescence. The Galápagos finches developed their particular beaks in order to adapt to their particular needs in their environments. Had they not done this, these finches would have surely died out. So the story goes today, much of technological and economic progress is now assumed to follow this evolutionary mold.[22] Like the finches, people also progress from one technology and theoretical method to another in order to have a greater chance of success, leaving behind their old, atrophied ways. Although I am certainly not the first to do so, I would like to challenge this Darwinian, reductive stance as it relates to progress and social relationships, particularly so with industrial agriculture and suicide.

In the midst of global climate change and agricultural crisis, the zeal with which the "developed" parts of the world have chased the logical outcome of Darwin's work is now clearer

[22] Here, I am drawing from the Greek *techne* to broadly indicate a way of knowing and artful craftsmanship, not necessarily in terms of technoscience.

than ever.[23] The irony of this zeal is that these developed regions have subjugated and oppressed members of our own species in the name of a "better" future, technologically speaking. This has become the case with farmers. In doing so, these subjugators are both jailor and jailed.[24] In sacrificing the livelihood of farmers, they sacrifice themselves. The overarching issue of this position is that it cannot be a simple matter of "us" and "them," to appeal only to the logical graces of those in charge of such development and industrial agriculture policymaking. The appeal is to something deeper. Otherwise, this cycle of violence has locked us in with no intention of deliverance.

In this space, here, in the discourse of life and death, resides an atmosphere of suicide. As atmospheres have preconditions, so too does the atmosphere of suicide. The face of death is often a foreboding and unsettling one. When this face of death resembles an adversary, one's action is quite straightforward: confront the adversary and prevail! This is how many lethal problems are treated, from radical terrorism to criminal networks, to resource control. In a macabre dance of subject and other, the roles of such a dance are clear. Lead and follow swing like a pendulum, until one either missteps, or the two emerge in a newly formed relationship.

However, this face of death can be uniquely annihilating and paradigm shifting when it is one's own. How does one dance to confront the mortal coil of oneself? "Other" vs. "self" breaks down when the other is "me." Further still, how does one navigate the sociopolitical structures that produce such a crisis of life and death? Where seeds of rice, corn, soy, and cotton often invoke images of comfort and provision, these images can also remind one of intense struggle,

[23] Most plainly stated here, I propose, as some formulation of "survival of the fittest, to totality."

[24] It is important to be careful of who the "we" is in this sort of context. Here, I am indicating that this "we" consists of those who encourage the model for technological progress and development that has led to blanket, colonial oppression in the name of such futures. That is, my critique is not equally applicable to all people. There is more discussion of the particular institutions involved in such views later in this work.

oppression, colonization, and the shortcomings associated with such a weight to provide for oneself and others. Farmers are currently dancing such a dance, and it is not going well. Those whose livelihoods matter a great deal to the ones they provide for are instead met with neglect and existential devaluation in the name of broad systemic efficiency. For many farmers, this neglect and devaluation has proved too heavy a burden to bear, resulting in their death.

To complexify things, suicide is regularly perceived as a cultural failure or of intense rejection of the "institution" of life itself. In this regard, those most vulnerable become the image of *ressentiment*.[25] To them, those most "alive" say defiantly, "You are not me!" and the cycle of neglect continues. Words seldom do such circumstances justice. In such complex relationships like the one between suicide and farming, I often find that metaphor, myth, and narrative can prove helpful in capturing some of the pieces that are difficult to articulate. So, I provide one now to the reader in an attempt to sketch some of the landscape of suicide, if you will.

Like Achilles championing the shield given to him by Hephaestus in memory of his best friend, Patroclus, many today choose the armor of the impenetrable God-craft over the humbling garments of their own existential sufferings.[26] To others, like Achilles, we boast of the image of our invulnerability and strength. People hide their relationships with suicide as a result of shame, fear of failure, perceived weakness, etc. Sometimes this behavior is outright avoidant, but it can also be indicative of other social motivators (ex: wanting to look desirable, successful, etc.). Similar to Achilles, we cannot evade our mortal marks, no matter the armor. It is time to widely

[25] *A la* Friedrich Nietzsche's use of *ressentiment* in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. For more, see the full text Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.

[26] For more on this example or to view this section of this work in its entirety, consult Homer's *Iliad* Book XVIII. The Shield of Achilles is quite apt for this example, since the shield also happens to pictographically chronicle the cosmological situatedness of humans, including celestial bodies, cities, farming, ruling structures, staple crops, domesticated livestock, leisure activities, and oceans.

and openly acknowledge the philosophical importance of a crisis of suicide among those who provide lifeblood for our societies. Doing so is not for the sake of preserving an image of invulnerability but for the sake of greater philosophical understanding of and compassion for our fellow humans.

Philosophically speaking, understanding as such can be a tricky term. Philosophical novices and masters alike struggle with this slippery concept. There are entire careers made and lost from parsing out exactly what it means "to know!" Much of the western side of the world has been in a prolonged state of philosophical arrogance with regard to knowledge and understanding since the works of Avicenna and René Descartes circulated in Late Antiquity and Modern periods.[27] For both of these prominent authors, whether one favors Avicenna's "floating man" or Descartes' "cogito," the idea is centrally the same: normative cognition and the linear capacity to articulate consistent concepts are the defining features of what one calls a "self."[28] One's linear productive thinking power is one's identity. This kind of self, in turn, is often presented as stable, desirable, and containing some marked degree of logical integrity. I suggest that this inward turn is persuasive, not because it is logically more coherent than other options but because it is more socially comfortable for those with power. Most do not live in a predictable, linear world. No matter how sure one is of one's logic, of one's metaphysical relations, or of one's consistency, one will always be confronted with life's lack of assuredness.

[27] This divide of "east" and "west" is rhetorically divisive rather than real or substantive. While geographical markers can be important, the Orientalist history associated with east and west is something that can readily fall under heavy critique. It is one thing to suggest, for example, that there are historical specificities with regard to theory and practice in eastern or western regions. It is quite another to suggest that these theories or practices are unable to communicate with one another because of innate characteristics of the people therein.

[28] Descartes, René. *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*. Translated and Edited by Roger Ariew and Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006 pp. 9-18. Although the first two meditations are most crucial to this point, the reader should also consider all six of Descartes' meditations as a whole. Both the ontological and causal proofs for God's existence, as well as the source of human error and mind/body split, contribute to this obsession over consistency and certainty.

Such was the historical change and practical insight offered by Descartes himself in his own later work when he discerned that the formal accuracy of his prior reductive, logical, and geometrical proofs was largely useless in practical matters.[29] He had devoted his entire life to the predictability and logical reductionism found in *Regulae* (albeit unfinished) only to walk back on his formal analysis and aims in a different text, *Discourse on Method*.

I want to be clear with the reader that there is not an undiscovered jewel to be had from this linear determinism within the context of this dissertation, no logical saving-grace to complete the transitions and blind spots of *Regulae* (or of projects like *Regulae*, for that matter). I do not say this pejoratively or polemically. I say this because Descartes correctly changed his philosophical stance, and we can do the same.

Descartes came to the conclusion that in terms of philosophical logic, things that are certain and things that are useful are at a conceptual impasse.[30] We would do well to heed this insight. To chase after one or the other is acceptable; to chase after both at the same time is to be lured by one's logical mesmers. Philosophy, as well as industrialization for that matter, have indeed been mesmerized by such promises of clarity and progress.

Thus, the reductive retreat into the mind for the sake of itself is not a journey to refuge, sobriety, and rigor but is rather an anesthetization. I would like to challenge the reader to reject

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[29] Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method*. Translated by Richard Kennington. Edited by Pamela Kraus and Frank Hunt. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007 pp. 24-37. Here, Descartes' practical philosophy takes quite a different tone than in his previous work in *Regulae*. While the incremental logic in *Regulae* is important, the reader is not presented with a case for method, as such, until *Discourse on Method*. Also consider Richard Kennington's interpretive essay, contained in the same volume, in which Kennington discusses the incommensurability of Descartes' utility with certainty, pp. 62-76. Despite Descartes' best efforts to give demonstrable maxims to the reader in *Regulae*, these maxims take a heuristic and autobiographical tone in *Discourse*. This is both a stylistic choice as an author of his own work and as an indirect response to Galileo's condemnation by the Catholic Church for Galileo's refusal to adhere to content censorship. Thus, Descartes' work is a discourse on method rather than a treatise on method.

[30] Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method*. Translated by Richard Kennington. Edited by Pamela Kraus and Frank Hunt. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007 pp. 48-57. For a more in-depth reading on Descartes' position, consult Part 6 of *Discourse*.

this common, knee-jerk, insulatory inward turn because it poses dire consequences for one's relationships with suicide. Instead, open oneself up to the struggles, uncertainties, and sufferings of others. Life is messy! We are an unsure and uncertain species! Logical inconsistency is our primary mode of communication, and this fact does not necessitate demand for perfected rationality. As a result, our infrastructural systems are commonly inconsistent, too. This does not mean that these logically inconsistent systems are necessarily worse! If the cost of systemic linear efficiency is our compassion, we cannot existentially foot that bill.

Through a kind of mutual vulnerability, one may yet find some practical understanding that eluded both Avicenna and Descartes for so many years.[31] The future of western philosophy and of inquiry is an inclusive and vulnerable one. If we wish to create a future of interdependence, support, and inclusion, we can deprivilege the excessive hubris present in the atomized, hyper-insulated, "self" that Descartes and Avicenna clung to.[32]

As a function of this deprivileging and in order to properly address this problem of suicide among farmers, in both its practical and theoretical aspects, there is the reality that the philosophical theories the west has implemented over the years are neither innocent nor are they simply historical in nature. Theories persist and live on in the institutions and infrastructure networks that form and shape particular parts of one's everyday lived experiences. Within this framing, it is my thesis that every empirical concept of suicide maintains an axiological concept

[31] Avicenna's "floating man" or "flying man" draws many of the same conclusions that Descartes' cogito discerns. For Avicenna, in *Fi'-Nafs/De Anima,* the floating man still possesses a self and exists for the basic fact that he is aware he is thinking, even without his senses at hand. This prioritization and emphasis on rational cognition produces a theoretical environment predicated on logical certainty and integrity, some 600 years prior to Descartes. I draw on this historical comparison to illustrate that Descartes was by no means alone in his radical and rational thinking.

[32] The individualistic mechanisms present in this era of philosophical thinking have mapped directly on to globalizing capitalistic systems. The "self" is the state production machine, constantly attempting to reaffirm (it)self through certainty and determinism. This relationship goes far beyond typical Marxist critique and best fits now with French regulation theory. I provide more on this in the coming pages, including the apt discussion of "accumulation regimes."

of suicide. For this reason, this dissertation highlights an epistemological tradition stemming from William James' ethical and moral questions, appearing in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*.

Philosophical Background

James' work in *The Will to Believe* is the historical starting point for what many scholars today consider the dominant ethical normative paradigm in the United States (i.e., utilitarian and rationally normative). Consequently, because of the far-reaching influence and imperialist enterprises of the United States, the outcomes of these beginnings from James also have theoretical and practical repercussions for other regions of the world. It is important to note that these repercussions are neither determinate nor destined; however, they are historically demonstrable. While it is true that the logic of James' work has fallen under heavy academic scrutiny over the years, it is my view that the existential import of James' analytic position has not received the attention and critique it deserves. The same holds true, by inclusion, for the traditions which James' work directly influenced. The content of James' overarching framework can be useful for contextualizing existential issues as they relate to resisting the colonial conceptions of value and efficiency.

In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" from *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, James distilled three questions that he considered fundamental in any ethical or moral inquiry.[33] These questions proved to be crucial elucidations of assumed inquiry practices during James' time, and both analytic and continental traditions in the West are confronted with these same questions today whenever ethical inquiry is present.

[33] James, William. "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Longmans, 1897. p. 185.

By James' own assertion, ".... there can be no final Truth in Ethics any more than in Physics, until the last man has had his experience and has had his say."[34] On the surface, it might seem as though James is suggesting that fundamental truth does not exist in ethics. This is not the case. Rather, he is making an early disciplinary gesture towards the complex nature of truth in ethics, as such. While the aims of James' statement are admirable for their openness, the performance of James' framework in the same text tells quite a different story than he suggests. Truth can change because experiences and narratives can change. This does not invalidate the truths of prior experiences or narratives.

The first question is what James terms the "psychological question." This question mainly concerns the origins for what one considers "good" and "evil." For James' time, this was a utilitarian question, of pleasures and pains situated against a largely (perceived) objective backgrounding. James' position falls into line with the classical utilitarian positions of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in this sense.

Good things were those that statistically tended towards pleasurable experiences. Bad things were those that statistically tended towards painful experiences.[35] Alas, the undoing of this classical utilitarian position was its inability to reconcile the *ideal* greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number with the *practical* good-enough-for-now. Thus, the relationships between good and evil as well as true and false were the discourse of the majority, which ended up being those with the most power and influence. In order to address this issue, various subsets of utilitarianism were created, trading the broad aims of Bentham and Mill for specific, applied niches. Despite this disciplinary adjustment, James' psychological question as well as the two

[34] Ibid. p. 184.

[35] See J.S. Mill's "Greatest Happiness Principle" from chapters 1 and 2 in *Utilitarianism*.

following questions still remain highly relevant. The psychological, utilitarian question of good and evil becomes a question of sacrifice and sovereignty.

The second question is the "metaphysical question." Here, the possible links between sentience, desire, and obligations are explored. To this effect, James asserts "Sure, there is no status for good and evil to exist in, in a purely insentient world. How can one physical fact, considered simply as a physical fact, be 'better' than another?"[36] This notion of simple, physical facts is still alive and well today, although it has now expanded to include all "obvious" knowledge from the perspective of those in power. There is no such thing as a physical fact that is simply a physical fact, no matter how seemingly innocuous it may be.

Even the "fact" that all people eventually die is wholly dependent on the subjective perceptions of those involved. In another formulation of the same point, people are *probably* dying after every word that I write in this paragraph. However, rather than empirically determining or proving this truth, I am trusting that this is the case. It is unverifiable and inconsistent to me in its total scope but nevertheless "true" in my lived experience. What are we then to say of this mere physical fact? We are required to believe things such as these into existence, as James argues later in the same work, in order to navigate the uncertainties that life presents oneself. In this sense, this truth is a living, dying, and dynamic one despite its linear logical incoherence. What is true, in experience, knowledge, expertise, argumentation, etc. requires shared empathetic grounds.

Finally, James' third question is the "casuistic question." This final question is concerning one's obligations and conflict resolution when obligations inevitably come into conflict with one another. This question occupies the majority of this dissertation chapter's tone.

[36] James, William. "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Longmans, 1897. P. 190.

This is the case not with respect to one's contractual obligations to others but instead with respect to the existential consequences of one's perceived inability to meet contractual obligations to oneself. The state of affairs is fairly simple when comparing obligations between people with similar socioeconomic status, political influence, etc. When power is imbalanced, or worse unilateral, obligations become much more difficult to navigate with any clarity. Such a crisis of farmer suicide begins with this tension between obligations to others and obligations to oneself.

The discussion around globalism has been a swinging pendulum for the last three decades. What were once compartmentalized discussions of obligations as they related to a contained nation-state (i.e., including valuations of good, evil, productive, unproductive, etc.) are now conversations that transcend such boundaries. On the one hand, some scholars have gestured towards a world that is becoming more homogenized, aiming towards a uniformity never before possible in human history. I refrain from addressing the ethical pitfalls of this homogenizing global view, as this would be an entire dissertation in itself. If all one looks at is business presence and economic participation, then I suppose this view does appear to be the case, at least on the surface. After all, many of the major fast-food chains and department store chains found in the United States have global presences today. I could go to a Pizza Hut in Dallas, Texas and receive the same order as a Pizza Hut in an Indian airport (and I have, minus the possibility of beef ingredients!).

On the other hand, other scholars have gestured towards a world that despite looking homogenous in some cases, has maintained its heterogeneity. I think this view is the more accurate of the two and also provides valuable resistance to imperialism. Occasionally, a homogenizing view will be presented as if homogenization is a natural inevitability or the course

that things are moving towards out of necessity. It is not so simple. Nations have direct influence on imperialism, and it is not the natural flow of culture to become so uniform.

So, I would encourage the reader to entertain the following thought: it does not matter so much that I could get the same Pizza Hut order in India as Dallas. What matters is that different people made it, it came from different sources, and the cultural context was different. Not to mention, different farmers were involved in the process! Somewhere along the way, farmers have gotten lost among this global shuffle, obscured in the periphery. Let us try to recover a more complete view of their place in agricultural infrastructure.

Messy and Uncertain Truth

People communicate and embody truth and facts, as they do death.[37] Linguistic and interpretive choices are made, and some part of the truth is necessarily left out. As an extension of these linguistic and lived choices, professional discourses of symbolic currencies exchange political positions for what constitutes "proper" or "real" investigation and question-asking. A part of me laments this reality, as the world would likely be a much more curious place if people were more Socratic in how they approached questions and expertise. It is not a focus of this work to challenge the efficacy or validity of such epistemological trajectories. We simply acknowledge that such professional discourse power exists, is historically demonstrable, and we navigate it when traversing agricultural infrastructure and politics.

More recently in the United States, these three questions from James have transformed into quite a different discussion about ethical and/or moral behaviors. In effect, the first question is mostly ignored, leaving the emphasis on the practical obligations or lack thereof towards

[37] In this way, facts only live on through their relationship with other facts, dissolving the asserted objectivity of facts themselves made by James.

others. Ironically, this conceptualization appears largely a one-way street, so to speak. This arrangement out of duty does not appear equitable to farmers in the same way that it is to consumers. James' second question remains. The third question narrows into a question of symbolic logical consistency.

For the United States, at least, this is largely due to the work of philosopher Bertrand Russell and his camp of analytic thinking.[38] Russell greatly narrowed his responses and interpretation of James' work in order to circumvent and avoid any religious overtones or (perceived) formal extraneous logical content.[39] With respect to James in particular, Russell states,

> If we are to adhere to the view that the 'stuff' of the world is 'experience', we shall find it necessary to invent elaborate and unplausible explanations of what we mean by such things as the invisible side of the moon. And unless we are able to infer things not experienced from things experienced, we shall have difficulty in finding grounds for belief in the existence of anything except ourselves. James, it is true, denies this, but his reasons are not very convincing.[40]

One does not need to have a foundation of firsthand experience in order to infer future and external novel experiences. I can support and understand the plight of farmers today without having farmed myself and without having been subsumed firsthand by the agricultural infrastructure.

As such, my egoism is not the primary factor in whether I evaluate something as good or bad. The experiences of farmers, their stories, successes, and failures exist and have value apart

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[38] This is not to say that Russel *caused* this shift. Rather, Russel's thinking and approach serve as a flagship for a widespread move towards logical reductionism. James' ethical beginnings are clearly worried of the potential consequences of such a move. One need not dismiss logical uncertainty or inconsistency so quickly.

[39] I would further articulate and broaden the presentation of Russell's arguments here as dismissive of anything "superstitious" rather than strictly religious. For Russell's analytic thinking, a label of superstitious logic intersects with inconsistent logic. Thus, anything lacking in formal clarity gets bundled under "religious," to be dismissed as an underdeveloped body of knowledge.

[40] Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. Vol. [New ed.]. London: Routledge Classics, [1946] 2004. p. 725.

from their connection to my own lived reality. Russel's consequentialist leanings are not the only way. The truth of such a relationship lies in the belief in something larger than me, in this case, the ideal of Justice in the context of a well-lived life. I believe in such a framing not because it affects my own experience of justice but that farmers are entitled to such justice by virtue of being human. Their value and inclusion should not depend only on how efficiently and expediently they produce.

Russell further suggests,

> The *Will to Believe* argues that we are often compelled, in practice, to take decisions where no adequate theoretical grounds for a decision exist, for even to do nothing is still a decision. Religious matters, James says, come under this head; we have, he maintains, a right to adopt a believing attitude although 'our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced'.[41]

Without risk, there is no faith. Subjectivity, as an awareness of the epistemological inadequacies of perspective, is the truth. Unfortunately for western philosophy, Russell's kind of logical reductionism became the staple and norm for western analytic thinking and policy formation in the 20th and 21st centuries. "Trimming the fat" of policy and budget, the association of efficiency with linear thinking, and international standards for "progress" and "development" all share conceptual common ground with Russell's philosophically reductive positions. Without valued, well-articulated, and logically validated experiences, the lived realities of others are cast aside as ill-founded.

So, why am I focusing on this philosophical history? I mention this particular brand of logical reductionism because it has persisted in the farming policy and industry institutions that are at play today in the west. Because of their reach, both in practice and theory, these policy and industry institutions have a direct effect on the livelihoods of farming communities. Since the

[41] Ibid., p. 726.

time that Russell was writing his responses to James' work, reductive and authoritative logics have become overt in their political alignments.

To be internationally "progressive" or "developed" now means to embody certain western ideals and *modus operandi*. Just as Russell logically reduced that around him to favor his own view of linear, consistent, and concise language, so too has western international policy reduced the views of other regions of the world to the category of extraneous or obsolete. Lack of understanding and clarity are rebranded as ill-founded logic on the part of "backwards" communities. Farming discourse outside of western utilitarian orthodoxy has been cast out as "other." Granted, there are some quite successful small-scale farming initiatives attempting to take back some power. However, these small-scale efforts are certainly not in the majority of farming movements.

There are normative behaviors or values that are generally considered good. For example, it would be incorrect and inaccurate of me, in my criticism of the criteria for "progressive" or "developed" people or ideas, to throw out benchmarks like low infant mortality rates, access to clean and safe water, low prevalence of communicable diseases, etc. all on the same grounds as previously stated. I am not disputing whether there is some degree of movement in a positive direction for some scientific and industrial practices. What I am disputing are the cases in which these general instances of good are used to *acritically justify* the future of the infrastructural system on the whole. In the case of farming technology and farming methods, there is a great deal of grey area to navigate. In addition to this grey area, there is a great deal of regional specificity behind what constitutes right or authoritative farming practices. What is "good," "progressive," "developed," etc. with respect to farming in the United States may not necessarily be so in India and vice versa.

Hannah Arendt Resurfaces

There are some philosophical frameworks and tools that can help one navigate this complex space concerning which knowledge counts, how political relationships become embedded in institutions, and to what extent this power landscape has an effect in our contemporary agricultural sphere. One of the authors that proves tremendously helpful in this area of scholarship is Hannah Arendt. As far as the United States is concerned, it seems that Arendt's work receded into the background until around the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Around the globe, authoritarian and totalitarian movements have gained more footing since then, which may be responsible for the resurgence in popularity regarding Arendt's work.

There is a wealth of scholarship currently tying the ramifications of this election to the resurgence of authoritarian movements and the slippage of the private into the public sphere.[42] Additionally, Arendt's rejection of her earlier conception of "radical evil" in favor of "banal evil" seems more relevant than ever in a political landscape where everyday *ad hoc* policy decisions defy any sense of traditional honor, truth, or courage.[43]

Put plainly, the fascistic and totalitarian ideals of Arendt's time have not gone to rest, as it seems many had hopefully believed. These totalitarian ideals have now become even more complexified through neoliberalism in ways that even Arendt could not have envisioned. A globalizing world has displaced the dynamic between public and private politics, to a greater degree than Arendt argues. In order to understand the atmosphere of farmer suicide and its relationships to such structures (i.e., oppressive reductive structures), one needs to begin with

[42] Richard J. Bernstein's book *Why Read Hannah Arendt Now* (2018) and Peter Burdon's book *Hannah Arendt: Legal Theory and the Eichmann Trial* (2017) come to mind.

[43] Rae, Gavin. "Hannah Arendt, Evil, and Political Resistance." *History of the Human Sciences* 32, no. 3 (July 2019): 125-6.

Arendt's presentation of the human condition.

For Arendt, the central system of the human condition is a push and pull between *homo faber* and *animal laborans* within the context of the *vita activa*. That is, there is a great deal of tension between the maker, who attempts to transcend worldly limitation through a world of fabricated things, and the biological living organism, who struggles with the physical limitations and demands of finitude. With regard to *homo faber*, Arendt states,

> The work of our hands, as distinguished from the labor of our bodies—*homo faber* who makes and literally 'works upon' as distinguished from the *animal laborans* which labors and 'mixes with….[44]

Placing these two items in different categories may seem odd by today's colloquial standards. When one goes out with friends or meets people for the first time, it is common for one of the first questions to be "So, what do you do?" While part of this may be genuine curiosity, this question is *really* asking, "How do you contribute to production?" In my experience sharing my professional expertise in philosophy, people usually follow up this question with, "Oh, you can make money doing that?" This is of course a recurrent problem for all the "arts" disciplines. The balance between economic and productive worth and fulfillment is a tricky ordeal.

Arendt further states,

> Fabrication, the work of *homo faber*, consists in reification. Solidity, inherent in all, even the most fragile, things, comes from the material worked upon, but this material itself is not simply given and there, like the fruits of fields and trees which we may gather or leave alone without changing the household of nature. Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process, as in the case of the tree which must be destroyed in order to provide wood, or interrupting one of nature's slower processes, as in the case of iron, stone, or marble torn out of the womb of the earth.[45]

In an ongoing struggle with one's own mortality, humans attempt to create things bigger and

[44] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. p. 136.

[45] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. p. 139.

greater than ourselves. Contemporary agriculture and large-scale farming are two of these things. We can also see this process with older things such as the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Great Wall of China, megacities, and the vast network of religious meeting structures across all major religions, just to name a few.

Arendt has more to say,

> The conviction that the greatest that man can achieve is his own appearance and actualization is by no means a matter of course. Against it stands the conviction of *homo faber* that a man's products may be more—and not only more lasting—than he is himself, as well as the *animal laborans*' firm belief that life is the highest of all goods. Both, therefore, are, strictly speaking, unpolitical, and will incline to denounce actions and speech as idleness, idle busybodyness and idle talk, and generally will judge public activities in terms of their usefulness to supposedly higher ends—to make the world more useful and more beautiful in the case of *homo faber*, to make life easier and longer in the case of the *animal laborans*.[46]

The frequency with which western institutions use utilitarian arguments to legitimize or delegitimize farming practices is well-documented at this point. Linear efficiency is equated with speed and provision, while non-linear methods are equated with slowness and waste. This linearity need not be the case! Agricultural industries need to slow down their pace and re-evaluate their goals. I understand there is a growing fear that such slower systems cannot adequately provide for a population. This fear is only true if one concedes disproportionately large consumer demand per capita as unchangeable within a similarly unchangeable infrastructure.

I want to be careful here not to project an image of "the agricultural industry" as a total cohesive body. While there are general trends in the behaviors of different infrastructural processes across agricultural industries, the outcomes of such general trends are highly regionally specific. The paradigm shift suggested in this work would likewise need to be

[46] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. p. 208.

regionally specific in order to avoid improper caricature.

Infrastructural trends, products, and processes live on long after the completion of their project. I turn to Arendt once again here for some insight,

> It is of great importance to the role fabrication came to play within the hierarchy of the *vita activa* that the image or model whose shape guides the fabrication process not only precedes it, but does not disappear with the finished product, which it survives intact, present, as it were, to lend itself to an infinite continuation of fabrication. This potential multiplication, inherent in work, is different in principle from the repetition which is the mark of labor.[47]

Here, I think Arendt is correct in stating that the fabrication process, as such, is not inconsequential as it accomplishes its initial goal of making things. Instead, fabrication itself becomes a commodity of which our lives of activity reckon. It is especially important to note here that for Arendt, the workings of both of these things (i.e., *animal laborans* and *homo faber*) are apolitical in their presentation.

If we are not careful, it can be easy to make a crucial misstep in reading Arendt. Sometimes Arendt's labor, work, and action are treated as "territories," in which individual instances of human activity are sorted.[48] This is a mistake, and all activity necessarily fits into all three of these terms, albeit to differing degrees. Labor, work, and action act as an interconnected triad of sorts instead of a stepwise sequence or *telos*. Additionally, we can recognize that the public sphere is where the possibilities of freedom, liberty, action, etc. may be realized. They are not however guaranteed in this space.

While this framework may have appeared patently true during Arendt's time, I am not convinced that this is still clearly the case with globalizing neoliberalism on the scene.

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[47] Ibid., pp. 141-2.

[48] Markell, Patchen. "Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of *The Human Condition*." *College Literature* 38, no. 1, 2011, p. 16.

Neoliberal, trans-national agreements and politics have made the political landscape so complex that it can sometimes prove difficult to argue for any sense of definitive national boundaries at all anymore. Is any nation merely confined to its physical geography? What about its political influence? Its economic influence? Its cyber influence? Its symbolic capital? Where are the boundaries?

To this effect of boundaries and power, we turn to what Arendt says about Immanuel Kant's vision of humanity as an end in itself. For Kant, it is extremely difficult to reconcile the disconnect between the "noumenal world" (i.e., the world of things) with the "phenomenal world" (i.e., the world of one's perception). In other words, there is no definitive way that I could convince my neighbor, or even myself, that my empirical foundations for knowledge are the correct ones from which one may build a foundation for other frameworks (like morals, for example). As Kant famously stated, such empirical foundations are always what the world is *to me* rather than how it might objectively exist. Reason alone is the way forward in this respect, through the vantage point of a perfecting human subject. Theoretically speaking, if one were to adopt certain preconditions and conditions for judgment and reason, then one could perfect humanity as such an end in itself.

It may seem tempting to the reader to logically abduct that I am appealing to a more perfect union of "humanity" or "human nature" in this piece as a response to suicide. I want to be clear with the reader that establishing humanity as an end in itself is, paradoxically, making the problems of instrumentalization, objectification, and suicide *worse* rather than better as one relates to non-human Nature (despite the noble intentions of viewing humanity as an end in itself). In establishing humanity (i.e., the abstracted kind of *perfected* or *perfecting* humanity) as

an end in itself, non-human Nature is left as a mere means to realizing this ultimate end.[49] Non-human Nature turns from a force of mutual respect into an instrument for human benefit, bar none. Arendt's keen awareness of this perennial political problem sheds light on the troubling historical duality between the "human" vs. subhuman, non-human, etc. As such, the formal consequences of this praxis relationship are that farmers are pushed into an ethereal space that is neither fully human nor fully in Nature. This objectifies farmers and relegates them to the infrastructural "other" trapped in the wake of those with power. If the agricultural infrastructural system continues its current course, farmers will drown in this wake.

One of the keys to resisting this kind of abstracted "humanity" is through historicization. By historicizing narratives of power and truth, that is by disrupting the chronological discourse one's culture tells itself, one opens the way for political plurality.[50] Through this plurality, one may un-make (*homo non faber*) the other-izing of farmers. In this spirit, it is time to examine some of the agricultural history and circumstances of farmers in the Midwestern United States.

[49] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. p. 156.

[50] Here, I use historicization in the Foucauldian sense. For the full notion and limitations of such a historicization in conversation with psychoanalysis and ethnology, consult the full text: Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, Inc., [1970] 1994. pp. 375-6.

CHAPTER 2

AGRICULTURE AND SUICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES

Ye set our feet on this life's road,
Ye watch our guilty, erring courses;
Then leave us, bowed beneath our load,
For earth its every debt enforces.

-Goethe
"The Song of the Harper"

Well, the sign at the church says "I'll reap what I'm sowin'"
But I ain't lost sleep, it'll come in due time
And if the Lord wants to take me, I'm here for the taking
'Cause Hell's probably better than tryin' to get by

-Tyler Childers, "Hard Times"

Originally, I struggled a great deal with whether to include my own family history in this work. While it is true that the primary focus is on farmers today, this also includes the familial, legacy histories of these people, including my own. I come from a long line of ancestral farmers, all the way until my parents, who chose professions in the medical field. Both avenues are heavily service oriented in their own ways, and giving back to the community has always been a strong value in my life. Perhaps this is one of the many reasons that I feel so strongly drawn to the service of university teaching, especially related to ethics and environment.

My paternal ancestors started out as poor, hard-working Norwegian farm hands near Trøndheim, marrying into the family that owned one of the farms they worked on. Some time later on, Norway experienced a series of crop famines as well as political disagreements with its European neighbors. My ancestors chose to send their children to the Midwestern United States, chasing the "American Dream" that was marketed to so many foreign interests. This was an uncertain time period for "blue collar" jobs and about a decade prior to the U.S. entering into its own Civil War. At the time, a large portion of the workforce in the U.S. was devoted to

agriculture, and the mega-cities and sprawling metropolises that exist today were only in their budding, pre-industrialized forms.

Publicly available census data shows Los Angeles only had a population of 1,600 people, Chicago had a population of under 30,000, and Dallas had a population of under 3,000 just to provide an idea of density. Transcendentalist notions of resisting "civilized" living became more and more popular in the United States, and families like mine were at the heartland of such counterarguments to industrialization. Philosophers like Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Margaret Fuller had anticipated the future of these cities and their surrounding countryside. These great thinkers did their best to argue for critical awareness of the boundaries between nature and machine, but to no avail.

While my ancestors certainly did not get rich off of farming by any means, they were supported by their local communities as well as family abroad. From the collection of letters and documents that I have found or recovered, they were happy with their lot in life (although their Lutheran faith emphasized the need for humility among such happiness!). Life was often difficult and afforded few conveniences, just by virtue of working with the rhythms of nature. The balance of farming production against small town demand was manageable for the time. If they had an especially bountiful year, it may have even been comfortable in their small communities.

As time went on, my ancestors moved around the Midwestern part of the United States, between Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Indiana, farming where and what they could across generations as long as the land was merciful, and business flowed. This was a common story for Midwestern immigration families who specialized in manual labor professions. It was a primal and sometimes harsh way to live that demanded they maintain close, intimate relationships with their environments. Occasionally, they would write to

family still living overseas to tell them of successes and failures in their new home.

Some winters were so brutish that they barely made it through. Other seasons, injuries incurred on the farm required outside help to get by. Large families were the staple for farming communities. Infant mortality rate was fairly high at the time, and even older children could die from the extreme labour conditions. There was a culture of respect and reverence for nature alongside a community respect for the well-being of local farmers. There was no Amazon Prime delivery or huge supermarkets offering year-round produce. It was both an honorable and skilled way to serve the community.

My mother's side of the family was much the same, although they also worked as sawyers and millers for lumber companies. I have kept up with this tradition, to a degree, taking up amateur woodworking when I have time. Her side immigrated to the Midwestern United States slightly earlier and carried Scottish and English heritage rather than Norwegian. Farming and other forms of manual labor were a staple in many facets of everyday life.

This family history translated into the communities that I was raised in near rural Indiana and Ohio. I was raised in-between the suburbs and the countryside, although if you travelled no more than 30 minutes outside of the city, you would find yourself among vast corn and bean fields, hay bales, and cows. To many today, this does not broadcast or possess "high culture" or excitement. To me it did, and it was home. These fields were like oceans that swayed in the wind to my wonder-filled eyes. While it had become increasingly popular to complain about the boring landscape of these rural communities, I disagreed with those around me.

The land was captivating despite the lack of towering mountain ranges, busy ports, or monumental skyscrapers. There is value, excitement, and beauty everywhere, even in the flatness of the great plains areas or seemingly mundane affairs of rural communities. Some of my

primary school classmates came from farming ancestry too, and there was a kind of small-community connectedness there. My classmates would tell me about the milk from their cows or the upcoming harvests that their family would be conducting, and this made my relationship with agriculture more personal than simply picking up the jug or package off the shelf at the local supermarket. There were even large Amish communities nearby that you could buy artisanal goods from. If you have the chance, they have some of the best pie you will ever eat in your life.

I remember visiting my paternal grandparents in rural Iowa and driving through what seemed like endless produce fields. Unless one lived in a suburb, one's closet neighbor was likely a couple of miles down the road, at least. There was a kind of tranquility and simplicity there that seemed to pull at my soul, even as a doe-eyed teenager oblivious to many of life's hardships. After serving in World War II, my paternal grandfather worked several jobs for a small, local school in Iowa. He was the bus driver, the track and field coach, football coach, softball coach, woodshop teacher, driver's education teacher, social studies teacher, and more, all in addition to raising his family. My paternal grandmother had her hands full with all of the children in combination with a small fishing and hunting resort business they ran nearby.

Cicadas would fill the evening air, swarms of lightning bugs could be found at night, and if you woke up at sunrise, you could watch fish jump in the mornings over a foggy lake surface. The land and environment were bigger than me, and I occupied but one space among many. My grandparents made it a point to spend as much time out in nature and on the land as possible with my sister and myself. There were no cell phones or TV to speak of, unless it was the Chicago Cubs playing (although teenagers today would laugh at what we called a cell phone then). I wish I had known then how precious these memories would be to me now.

We would watch for birds, fish, go for long walks by the fields, help my grandparents

repair things that broke, and listen to family heritage accounts of farming and what it was like to live through the Great Depression, World War I, World War II, and so on. Meals were simple but filling, as was characteristic of farming families. I learned to clean and cook the fish we caught that day, game or deer that my grandfather had hunted, or some other meal forged from nearby farm products. On the other side of the family, my maternal grandmother still holds the lands that our ancestors farmed on generations ago, although most of the surrounding area is quickly filling with suburban sprawl.

Aside these romantic notions I have are also instances of intense struggle around me. Farms closed because of production issues, some families went bankrupt, and others sold in search of more stable professions. As I grew older, farms were regularly a source of possible income in the summers and falls for the eager young adult. It was extremely difficult work in most cases, and farmers were being pinched for every penny they had in the 1990s and early 2000s. Teenage boys my age were especially helpful in that we were cheap, durable labour in an industry that was on the brink of infrastructural collapse in many cases. This was over 20 years ago, and things have not improved.

I have chosen to share this family history because it gestures towards the emotional and existential connections with land and farming that could soon be lost, I fear. It is not enough to provide valid, sound, and consistent arguments for why farmers *should* be better taken care of or why policymakers *should* lessen their greed as it relates to the agricultural industry and its infrastructure. In some ways, this is a philosophical lesson just as old as some of the first philosophies available on record. Plato's dialogues are ripe with this tension between emotion and logic as it relates to rhetoric and policy. Cicero made regular calls to public service alongside his fellow citizens who became more complacent and gave in to the convenience of empire.

What makes life worth living is the central, perennial question of philosophy. All else follows from there.

In the 1800s, around 90% of the U.S. population lived on farmland. Now, just over 1% of the U.S. population lives on farmland. There are far fewer farmers today, and farm size has increased considerably.[51] Granted, farming technologies and innovation certainly account for some of this shift in scale. We can produce much more volume today with machinery available than one could by hand or rudimentary automatic tools in the 1800s. However, along with this change comes a reliance on mega-scale farming methods and industrial subsidy structures that are trapping farmers in an unsustainable production and work cycle. It is no longer a profession that many view with respect and care, unless one happens to already share some history with farming. The agricultural industry is *consuming* as well as *subsuming* its contributors, to the detriment of their mental health and well-being.

The Crisis

Farmers in the United States are in a state of suicide crisis.[52] Time and time again, I have been asked for "real proof" of this crisis by others, both inside and outside of the academy. I do not take this with any ill-will. Rather, it is an indicator that this problem of farmer suicide regularly escapes public consciousness and the field-of-view of everyday life. Furthermore, it is easy to understand why people may not be sure of farmer suicide problems, considering the CDC retraction of 2012 farmer suicide data and analysis. This study had received a lot of positive

[51] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Farming and Farm Income." 2021. Available from: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/farming-and-farm-income/.

[52] The problem of farmer suicide also extends to other parts of the United States, but the links between the Midwest and India are the most direct and clear for the purposes of this work. As this dissertation is not intended to be a treatise of any kind, expanding a study of farmer suicide to include the entire country's geography is beyond the scope of this piece. I may return to this issue in the future and expand on this research.

feedback and acclaim, and it is understandable to see people upset at its inaccuracy.

So, I gladly provide such data and proof. There is one component of this research that could be improved, and this component is firsthand interviews with farmers themselves to corroborate already-existing interviews conducted by journalists and news companies. Because of the extraordinary nature, length, and impossibility of safe travel in the COVID-19 pandemic, these firsthand interviews could not be conducted in this dissertation project. They will be an important piece of future examinations in this field. This is a warning that the examples and statistics to follow are difficult to write about let alone read. The situation among farmers is grim, and many accounts are heartbreaking.

Overall, the prevalence of suicide in the United States has been on the rise, and the CDC has produced a recent list of occupational categories in which the rate of suicide is considered statistically higher than the population rate. This data has been difficult to follow, as the previous CDC farmer suicide data sets from 2012 went through a controversial retraction due to "coding errors" and validity concerns.[53] Sometimes farmers were classified as working in "management" professions rather than the "triple-f" of farming, fishing, and forestry. Understandably, the public became quite confused over such a retraction, questioning whether this problem really existed at all for farmers. Some of this public caution and skepticism still exists today. The newest CDC study into suicide can mend some of this mistrust, but it will take time.

Agriculture, farming, fishing, and forestry all occupy statistically "significant" places in the CDC's data.[54] That is to say that these proportional suicide rates are high enough that the

[53] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Retraction Notice: Suicide Rates by Occupational Group—17 States, 2012." 16 November 2018. Available from: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6745a6.htm.

[54] See Peterson C, et al. "Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation — National Violent Death Reporting System, 32 States, 2016." MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020; 69:59, 61. With a reported 95% Confidence Interval, the CDC has determined that agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting have a male suicide rate of 36.1 per 100,000 civilians. The female suicide rate in this category was not conclusive. More specifically, farmers, ranchers, and other

CDC recommends that one should pay extra attention to them and that their findings are not a result of chance. Over the course of the last four years or so, the National Farmers Union has repeatedly reached out to the Office of the President and Congress, with little resulting support or help. There are of course individual senators and congresspeople who have extended economic aid, but this aid is too small compared to the widespread scale of this issue. I am hopeful that this relationship may improve with a change in governing administration, but I do not think we can "put all the eggs in one basket," as it were. Subsidies have been cut, demand remains unsustainably high for product, and farmers have been trapped into accepting mega factory farming, corporate deals in order to make a living while providing for the United States general population.

In its truest form, this process has become a philosophical "wicked problem." Wicked problems are those that are so pervasive and encompassing that they do not offer opportunity for straightforward and clear solutions.[55] Consequently, wicked problems disorient one's sense of place as well as one's sense of time. There are a few key infrastructural shifts that need to occur in order for the severity of farmer suicide to lessen within this wicked problem. I have included a list below and explain each point further as this work continues.

1.) Consumer demand for country-wide agricultural products in the United States is running at a feverish pace. This needs to slow down if farmers are to regain substantial footing. Currently, the only viable option for many farmers is to join massive factory farming efforts in

agricultural managers have a male suicide rate of 43.2 per 100,000 civilians and female suicide rate of 17.5 per 100,000 civilians. This data was collected over a sample of 32 states, and the average of all occupational data collected was a suicide rate of 27.4 for men and 7.7 for women.

[55] Rittel, Horst W.J. and Webber, Melvin M. "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning." *Policy Sciences* 4, 1973 pp. 160-1.

order to be eligible for meaningful subsidies.[56] The bottom line is consumers need to consume less, and consumers will likely need to look to more seasonal options opposed to the convenience of year-round produce offerings. While consuming less is not the end-game solution to this complex situation, it is a good starting point.

2.) The narratives of efficiency, progress, and worth need to change at both the local and federal levels. These three terms are bound-up in narrow and broad economy and politics in such a way that they are not welcoming to the input of farmers themselves. Farmers can be involved, democratically, in discussions regarding the worth, production, and character of their industry.

3.) While economic relief is an important aspect for remedying the effects of farmer suicide, this is but a small patch in a sinking vessel. The discourse and cultural-scientific paradigm around suicide treat it as though it is pathological, to be cured and eradicated under the right conditions. Many state departments even have "suicide prevention" policies and resources, as though it works the same way as washing one's hands and receiving a vaccination. I suggest that this discourse and paradigm shifts away from such pathology and towards farmer suicide as a complex sociopolitical phenomenon that validates the existential struggle of such individuals.

In this case, one promising way to approach such a wicked problem is through an understanding of infrastructure. By understanding, I do not mean a complete, comprehensive "bird's eye view" but rather an ongoing dialectical process. As bits and pieces of the problem come into view, others may become obscured.

In order to understand where we can go, we need to understand where we have come

[56] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Price Support." 2020. Available from: https://www.usda.gov/topics/trade/price-support. Of the kinds of subsidies available for farmers, the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills encourage price support programs in the following areas: commodity loans, electronic loan deficiency, market loss assistance, peanut program loan crops, and recourse marketing assistance loans. While these programs aim to alleviate market stresses economically, they do not address limited access to mental health care or infrastructural breakdown.

from. All of the farming and agricultural subsidies in the United States function off of the same economic model as lines of credit. Such a model began in the 1970s when capitalist systems started to see overaccumulation in the face of proposed unfettered growth. In their 1972 publication *The Limits to Growth*, Dennis Meadows, Donna Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William Behrens III presented a study from leading scholars and MIT that showed the inaccuracy of exponential capitalist growth models. In a world landscape that was rapidly changing and growing with respect to production and commodities, countries found themselves faced with growth issues and were trying to figure out why. After all, the mantra of the day was unlimited planetary resources and a cornucopia of raw material to choose from. This mantra proved false in the long run. Consequently, the dominant agricultural production narrative in the United States has been one of abundance, unwavering stability, and plenty.[57] This too has proven false over time.

In the 30-year revisitation of the same work, Meadows and Randers found themselves faced with the same questions and problems that existed over 30 years ago. Specifically, they pose critical questions such as,

> Growth of what? For whom? At what cost? Paid by whom? What is the real need here, and what is the most direct and efficient way for those who have that need to satisfy it? How much is enough? What are the obligations to share?[58]

The same questions are still relevant today in a landscape that is becoming even more globalizing.

In addition to these important questions, Meadows and Randers point out that there are

[57] Sanford, A. Whitney and Shiva, Vandana. *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. p. 29.

[58] Meadows, Donella H., Randers, Jørgen, and Meadows, Dennis L. *The Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*. Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004. p. 49.

only three main ways that our world responds to going beyond its sustainable limits. One way is to deny, disguise, or confuse the signals; a second way is to appeal to technical or economic fixes; a third way is to work on the underlying causes.[59] The world has seen an abundance of the first way over the last six years or so. Climate change denial and unfettered capitalism are still more popular than I would like to admit. The second way is always available given the fast pace of technology development and innovation, although we can take caution not rely on it as a means to *deus ex machina*. Power dynamics can be difficult to navigate with technological development and innovation, as people rarely own the means to producing such technological commanding presence.

At this point, the third option is both the most complex and the most promising. In taking this third option, it will require widespread acknowledgment that the current agricultural system is fundamentally broken. Acknowledgment of broken systems means more money and time spent by policymakers. More money and time spent by policymakers means an anticipated drop in constituent approval rating. Additionally, Meadows and Randers are quick to point out the threat this third option poses to those with economic or political power.[60] I think they are correct in this political evaluation. It is dangerous to the mental health and well-being of farmers to continue as things are, and it can also be dangerous to push back.

To compound this wicked problem of farmer suicide, the industry (and also the globe) was hit with yet another wicked problem: the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of this research, just under two years ago, I had not envisioned needing to speak of an event of such magnitude. Times have changed, and this pandemic has yielded invaluable insight as to the failings and

[59] Ibid., p. 236.

[60] Ibid., pp. 236-7.

shortcomings of the agricultural industry. Even more still, it has shown an even greater degree of struggle for farmers than was already present before this event. As in Albert Camus' famous 1947 novel *The Plague*, state and federal authorities in the United States were slow to respond to the threats the virus posed. Whether this was out of ignorance or an ill-conceived invulnerability complex is up for debate, of course. At the end of the day, the public has suffered immensely. As a result of this denial and snail's pace response, logistical pathways and agricultural production have still not recovered, over one year later.

COVID-19 Complications

The COVID-19 pandemic has made this entire ordeal especially difficult and has provided quite a few invaluable infrastructural lessons. I wish to be one of many academics documenting the dynamics of this pandemic, as it relates to agriculture and farmers, for the sake of posterity. The case was already so dire for so many farming communities before this worldwide tragedy. It is now even more so, and the status quo is not a viable option. Just one month after President Donald Trump declared the pandemic a national emergency, agricultural sub-sectors started to bottom out in April of 2020. In all meat and dairy industries, farmer's share percentage from products decreased considerably while retail price remained nearly the same.[61] [62] [63] The demand was still there, and people expected the same kinds of pricing that they were accustomed to when shopping at their local supermarkets. In order to placate the concerns of consumers, the government stepped in to adjust pricing on the retail end of the supply chain.

[61] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Dairy Data." 2021. Available from: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/dairy-data/

[62] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Livestock & Meat Domestic Data." 2021. Available from: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/livestock-meat-domestic-data/

[63] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Meat Price Spreads." 2021. Available from: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/meat-price-spreads/

For the time being, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has suspended debt collection, foreclosure, and other issues related to farm loans. It is not clear if this practice will continue once vaccine rates start to normalize prior ways of life. Despite this, farmer share percentages are just now starting to recover to their previous levels, over one year later. "Price-trigger commodities" saw 5% or greater price declines, and these were automatically eligible for Coronavirus assistance program funding.[64] If farmers could not precisely quantify their crop losses, then these could be categorized under "flat-rate crops." Farmers were also eligible for some Coronavirus assistance program funding, including up to 100 acres of replant. With an average U.S. farm size of over 400 acres, replanting 25% of that does not go far in terms of stabilization.

This raw crop loss does not even include the consequences of the logistical and communication breakdown that COVID-19 caused the agricultural industry. Milk dumping became such a common practice in the face of supply chain problems that the U.S. Risk Management Agency is even allowing farmers to temporarily count dumped products regardless of if the milk was actually sold. Animal and livestock forced culling has also become practice when supply chain shipments miss their schedules and deadlines. The way that the current agricultural industry is setup, farms maintain extremely tight margins of animals, livestock, and products under the assumption that there will be near-constant logistical movement. It is like a delicate revolving door moving at an extremely fast rate of speed. Anything substantial that gets in the way or moves too slowly risks breaking the system entirely.

In terms of agricultural agreements and workarounds, farmers have the choice of

[64] This information is available from the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Resources Fact Sheet found at: https://www.farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance/cfap.

engaging in four main kinds of contracts when it comes to producing and selling their goods.[65] These four contracts are outlined below:

1.) Futures contracts: an agreement to buy or sell a commodity or an asset at a predetermined price at a specific date and time. Organized futures trading is often used for major agricultural commodities, where traders can opt for futures trading as a way of hedging against price risks for a commodity.

2.) Options contracts: offer the right to purchase or sell an instrument at a set price, regardless of the market price at the time of sale. For agricultural commodities, the option is on a futures contract for a commodity, rather than on the commodity itself.

3.) Marketing contracts: are agreements to exchange a specified asset for a certain price on a future date. They are neither standardized nor tradeable. Marketing contracts also reduce market risk by securing a buyer and a delivery window for the farmer's output.

4.) Production contracts: are agreements under which a farmer agrees to raise livestock or crops for a contractor, which may or may not be another farm. The farmer is paid a fee for growing services, while the contractor provides key inputs and markets the product.

As energy use and interest rates have increased for farms, the numbers of contracts that hedge against future risk have also increased. This prevalence of risk mitigation is an indication that the market is becoming more unstable for farmers. Mathematically and economically speaking, these contracts *should* be enough to shield farmers from large losses in the event of widespread crop destruction or infrastructure issues. The pandemic has shown that these contractual measures were nowhere near enough. Granted, I do not know if it is reasonable to expect those in charge of structuring and providing such securities and failsafes to anticipate a pandemic of this scale. Nevertheless, the point of inadequacy stands.

In a new study, some scientists have estimated that the fertile topsoil in as much as one-

[65] The following contracts are from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Farm Use of Futures, Options, and Marketing Contracts." October 2020. Available from: https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=99517.

third of the total farmable land in the Midwest is now losing its arability.[66] While the one-third figure from this data is certainly new and contestable, the overall environment does not bode well for farming families. Farmers in Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa may find themselves facing erosion issues that would create further degrees of instability and volatility in production processes. The normalized methodology for many of these farms is in the form of large-scale, over farming structure. Put simply, we can farm a large volume in a relatively short amount of time this way. Methods and practices that encourage fast, large-scale over farming do not allow for rebuilding of topsoil and the refixation of nitrogen via proper crop rotations.

So, what is one to make out of such a mess? What kind of theoretical, philosophical direction is there among so many variables and changing circumstances? The conceptual architecture of Hannah Arendt's work can help one understand what has happened thus far. According to Arendt,

> The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.[67]

The agricultural industry and infrastructure, as it currently operates, is fundamentally as Arendt describes here. Through the abstraction of labour within this system, the direct relationships between farmers, products, and consumers are no longer in clear view, despite depending on one another. This does not mean that the natural response is a return to basic bartering economies or

[66] Charles, Dan. "New Evidence Shows Fertile Soil Gone From Midwestern Farms." *National Public Radio.* 24 February 2021. Available from: https://www.npr.org/2021/02/24/967376880/new-evidence-shows-fertile-soil-gone-from-midwestern-farms.

[67] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. pp. 52-3.

something of that sort. What this does mean is that the intricate relationships of the agricultural infrastructure can be further illuminated and brought into public awareness. “Joe the plumber” and “Jane the doctor” can know how their purchases affect the family in Wisconsin that provided the butter they bought. The agricultural system hides these relationships, as they are not necessary for the raw, practical efficiency of such a system. As a consequence, the sufferings of farmers go unnoticed as long as the delivered price to the consumer is within reasonable bounds.

Arendt provides more words of wisdom, this time regarding the relationship between isolation and social connectivity. For Arendt, the private and the public have complex histories that are closely connected to politics as a social way of life. Even at the time of publication in 1958, Arendt noticed that aims of the public realm were being conflated with the aims of the private realm. The public space is one where aspects of political life may come to fruition and not a space where personal interest is amalgamated to the whole. Arendt states,

> This can happen under the conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case in tyrannies. But it may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor. In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.[68]

The national gridlock following the initial waves of the pandemic provided a gold-standard case study in this dynamic the likes of which had never been seen before. In perhaps the most singular, forced stroke of national unity since World War II, people sacrificed the plurality of

[68] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998. pp. 58-9.

their views if it meant keeping the virus away from their loved ones.[69] The democratic aims of the public sphere, as a facet of an ultimate political end, were put on hold while infrastructure was on the brink of total collapse. In-between the drama of toilet paper shortages, cleaning supply hoarding, and gasoline buying frenzies, farmers were expected to produce like normal. The private suffering of farming communities entered into the public sphere, and it was erased by the world of things. Eventually, the virus would find its way into large-scale agricultural operations too, making that aspect of life hazardous as well. Mass-production meat and produce facilities experienced large-scale outbreaks, and there were even concerns that the virus could be passed via meat or produce products themselves, for a time.

To really understand this dynamic, we can get to the theoretical "root" of public perception and the agricultural system itself. In Arendt's overall framework, there is a world of appearances or resemblances in which the public interacts. This world of appearances is built upon a backdrop of a world of things. This view appears to be both historically and conceptually accurate as it relates to *animal laborans* and *homo faber* within the context of *vita activa*. However, in the present day, it is no longer clear if these worlds are distinguishable from one another. Furthermore, "the farmer," as they appear to the public, has been conflated with the farmer as a symbolic object and device. Instead of farmers being people who make things to consume, farmers are becoming things that make things, by virtue of abstracted labour in the system. In turn, this produces a socially isolating environment. The public fear of isolation (from a dependable system) is similar to the isolation farmers experience as it relates to struggle and suicide. In a way, the two are inversely proportional to one another in their logic. As the public

[69] Now that the success of various vaccines and precautionary measures is easier to notice, people have returned to protecting their freedom and liberty. In some areas of the country, people behave as if the pandemic did not happen at all.

feels less isolated from the agricultural system (by an abundance of product availability), farmers live in increasing isolation as their philosophical and existential needs are not met.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown difficulties as they relate to specific crops. As recent as August of 2020, corn and cotton plantings had fallen to their lowest levels in 37 years.[70] I take care to differentiate this planting decrease from economic models, such as the forms of contracts discussed previously, as they are not of the same kind. There is already some chatter about projected crop sales increasing a great deal by the end of 2021. In February of 2021, *Successful Farming* reported that farmers may see record high prices for corn and soybean crops by the end of the year.[71] Given that they are so temporally distanced from their projected outcomes, it is good logical practice to be cautious of such forecasts. Change has shown its expediency and unpredictability in this global pandemic.

Projections like these are not equally distributed among all of the possible contracts that farmers can choose from. If a farmer is fortunate enough to secure a futures contract with substantial risk mitigation, then they may indeed see favorable returns. It is important to note that this kind of an arrangement is heavily dependent on public perception of "returning to normal" as more become vaccinated. Otherwise, farmers are at the mercy of snap market trends during this volatile and hazardous time.

Following October of 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture noted that difficulties among farmers have been "much less visible" alongside sensationalized reports of "big box" store brawls and nationwide shortages. The assumption by the USDA and policymakers seems to

[70] Weinraub, Mark. "U.S. farmers leave fields fallow as COVID-19 wrecks crop prospects." *Reuters*. 10 August 2020. Available from: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-crops/u-s-farmers-leave-fields-fallow-as-covid-19-wrecks-crop-prospects-idUSKCN2561C8.

[71] Abbott, Chuck. "Record Corn And Soybean Crops Possible As Farmers Chase High Prices." *Successful Farming.* 19 February 2021. Available from: https://www.agriculture.com/news/crops/record-corn-and-soybean-crops-possible-as-farmers-chase-high-prices.

be that the decreasing visibility of farmers is a structural anomaly rather than a structural norm inherent to the agricultural system. This is an ill-conceived assumption. Visibility of farmer struggle is antithetical to the efficiency of the current agricultural infrastructure. It normalizes farmers as objects rather than subjects.

News outlets chose to cover people fighting over the same packaged meat and produce that farmers are responsible for in the first place.[72] If these troubling trends and their effects are here to stay, then critical illumination of our place and connection in such an expansive network is vital. An illumination of this category is a daunting task to undertake but one that is possible, nonetheless. Perhaps philosophy's clearest historical insight is that such an activity of critical illumination is arduous. The roots of habits and ethics run deep, no matter if these habits are beneficial or detrimental. It is a perennial problem and tension between the convenience of ignorance and the inconvenience of critical thinking. As such, the philosophical "soil" is turned.

Like Arendt's well-orchestrated séance in which the table suddenly disappears, the structural "table" of the agricultural industry has also disappeared. Following this disappearance is a paradox of farmers, consumers, and policymakers dissonantly connected in a world that no longer makes sense. Let us rebuild an awareness of the interdependency at stake in a way that is not only effective and productive but also radically compassionate and understanding. The ubiquitous nature of this complex problem has been taken up and mobilized by medical discourse as a pathological issue. This pathological character of medical discourse reinforces assumptions of linear cures for such pathology. A logical conception of this nature severely limits possible policy options related to farmer suicide.

[72] U.S. Department of Agriculture. "America's Farmers: Resilient Throughout the COVID Pandemic." 13 October 2020. Available from: https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2020/09/24/americas-farmers-resilient-throughout-covid-pandemic.

An Epidemic?

"The Silent Epidemic of Male Suicide,"[73] "The Epidemic of Suicide,"[74] "Suicide is Gen Z's second-leading cause of death, and it's a worse epidemic than anything millennials faced at that age,"[75] "Are We Facing a Post-COVID-19 Suicide Epidemic?,"[76] A National Suicide Epidemic,"[77] "All-American Despair,"[78] "Another Tragic Epidemic: Suicide,"[79] Suicide, the epidemic we are overlooking,"[80] "Suicide Is Becoming America's Latest Epidemic,"[81] "We need to pay more attention to the epidemic of suicide,"[82] and "Suicide: the Hidden Epidemic."[83] I have provided this litany of news headlines and article samples as but a small portion of the current suicide conversation and culture. These are juxtaposed against innumerable news headlines and articles referencing the "suffering" of the economy. We need not take these words

[73] Bilsker, Dan and White, Jennifer. "The Silent Epidemic of Male Suicide." *British Columbia Medical Journal*. Vol. 53, number 10, 2011: 529-534.

[74] Bishop SS. "The Epidemic of Suicide." *JAMA.* 1893;XXI(10):353.

[75] Kiersz, Andy and Akhtar, Allana. "Suicide is Gen Z's second-leading cause of death, and it's a worse epidemic than anything millennials faced at that age." *Business Insider*. 17 October 2019. Available from: https://www.businessinsider.com/cdc-teenage-gen-z-american-suicide-epidemic.Available from: https://www.businessinsider.com/cdc-teenage-gen-z-american-suicide-epidemic.

[76] Vitelli, Romeo. "Are We Facing a Post-COVID-19 Suicide Epidemic?" *Psychology Today*. 7 June 2020. Available from: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/media-spotlight/202006/are-we-facing-post-covid-19-suicide-epidemic.

[77] Relias Academy. "A National Suicide Epidemic." 2021. Available from: https://reliasacademy.com/rls/store/suicide-epidemic-and-how-to-prevent-suicide.

[78] Rodrick, Stephen. "All-American Despair." *Rolling Stone*. 30 May 2019. Available from: https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/suicide-rate-america-white-men-841576/..

[79] Wallis, Claudia. "Another Tragic Epidemic: Suicide." *Scientific American*. 1 August 2020. Available from: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/another-tragic-epidemic-suicide/.

[80] Saraff, Pooja. "Suicide, the epidemic we are overlooking." *The Indian Express.* 24 June 2020. Available from: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/suicide-the-epidemic-we-are-overlooking-6472617/.

[81] Menon, Rajan. "Suicide Is Becoming America's Latest Epidemic." *The Nation*. 18 June 2019. Available from: https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/suicide-rate-americas-latest-epidemic/.

[82] Brooks, Arthur C. "We need to pay more attention to the epidemic of suicide." *The Washington Post.* 24 January 2020. Available from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/suicide-is-not-someone-elses-problem-its-a-problem-for-all-of-us/2020/01/23/d420c48c-38a4-11ea-bb7b-265f4554af6d_story.html.

[83] Weir, Erica. "Suicide: the Hidden Epidemic." *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 2001 Sep 4 165(5): 634–636.

lightly. Theoretical mechanisms do not suffer. Living things suffer. The economy does not suffer. The people that make up the economy suffer.

There are many more articles and headlines available that use the same predominant language of suicide as an "epidemic," which seems to be reinforcing this language for future publications as well. As any academic knows, it helps to publish what is popular or trending. If articles on epidemics are gaining traction, we can expect more articles using the same language as a way of providing credibility. While the general sentiment is clear enough (i.e., suicide is a *bigger problem* now), the language choice is not helping those in need. Since this is the case with language around suicide generally, so too is it the case with farmer suicide.

Philosophically speaking, categorical choices like this are not free from political connections or cultural history. While word choice is not deterministic in how people view actions and concepts, it does influence how people perceive the world around them. Labelling suicide as an epidemic does not *guarantee* that people will view it as such, but it does greatly increase the likelihood that people will import history and politics of epidemics and map them onto suicide discourse. In terms of etymology, we can see this dynamic with most linguistic turns and change over time. Definition and concept are co-constitutive and continually remake one another.

One clear and parallel example of this phenomenon is through the dehumanizing of enemy combatants in times of war. Enemies are labeled as animals, terrorists, targets, etc. Over time, categorical labels like these allow for a shift in conceptualization away from the reality of enemies as complex humans and towards the reality of enemies as simple things. Following this logic, one could end the life of another as one would destroy a piece of old furniture. Abstraction of this kind erases difference in a way that allows for subsumption into a differing concept. That

enemy combatant may have been a father, mother, brother, sister, a philanthropist, or a brilliant academic. These defining characteristics are conditionally cut out to fit a different mold. “The war on drugs,” “the war on terrorism,” and “ending world hunger” are all illustrations of objective abstraction in an attempt to conceptually grasp wicked problems.

The same kind of abstraction and objectification process can happen through framing suicide as an epidemic when the logical transition links between disease and mental health are not present. What was once perhaps a useful metaphor speaking to the scale and prevalence of suicide has now morphed into prevailing authoritative discourse. In the service of critical thinking, we can repeatedly ask, “Who is the subject and who is the object in this relationship?”

As another example, we can observe this abstract objectification phenomenon in systematic chess players. Rather than focus on the unique aspects of their opponent like what they like to play, tendencies in how fast decisions are typically made, what kind of mental state they have been in lately, any past moments of confusion, etc., systematic players will memorize the statistically most successful lines in any given situation. This kind of objectification is a conservative approach intended to mitigate personal bias and errors on the part of the systematic player.

The opposing player becomes a thing rather than a complex person. If the systematic player loses a game, then they can re-examine their strategy to find a more efficient line, perhaps even by consulting a machine learning engine. Quite a few people have been very successful using this approach. A major weakness to this style of play is that it does not adapt well to unconventional lines and may be constricted in novel game contexts. Again, as with the previous example, an objectification like this can be useful in a short-term utilitarian sense, but it is not contextually accurate to the multiple variables at hand.

So, apart from drawing attention to the prevalence of farmer suicide, what kind of logical work is this language of epidemics performing? The word "epidemic" carries a lot of historical and political baggage with it, and this historical and political baggage can be unpacked to see its logical effects. According to the CDC, "Epidemic refers to an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in that population in that area."[84] In epidemiology, disease and viruses are often assigned basic reproduction numbers, sometimes called R coefficients. This is one of the main factors used to report "what is normally expected." These coefficients model how transmissible the disease or virus can be in population samples. It is not possible to adequately gauge such a mechanism as it relates to mental health. Furthermore, there are no vaccines for suicide. There are two more detailed logical problems with this approach and categorization as it relates to suicide.

First, the earliest etymologically recorded uses of "epidemic" as related to disease date back to the 17th century, just following the developments of the scientific revolution in Europe. Prior to this scientific revolution, French, Greek, and Latin uses of epidemic did not necessarily or directly denote disease associations. By the 18th century, epidemic categorizations were regularly associated with diseases. It is not a coincidence that this etymology changed at the same time that medical practice and expertise exploded in popularity throughout Europe.

Medical discourses of power, specifically anatomy, physiology, and germ theory, took up and commanded the term epidemic as disciplinary currency. As such, anything that was epidemic in its character or presentation was to be "cured" the same as disease or miasma. Granted, this was a useful tool given the widespread disease concerns around Europe blended with rapidly increasing urban population density. Despite this fact, farmers and their struggles

[84] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Lesson 1: Introduction to Epidemiology." 18 May 2012. Available from: https://www.cdc.gov/csels/dsepd/ss1978/lesson1/section11.html.

with suicide (be this suicidal ideation, suicide behavior disorder, etc.) need not be alienated as if they have bubonic plague. As a society, we can be more compassionate and understanding than has been historically demonstrated.

Second, considering psychology and psychiatry expertise, the jury is still out on suicide's classification as a disease. While suicidal ideation and suicide behavior disorder are possible options, the science behind these classifications is inexact in its practice. This is not to say that the science is unreliable or dubious but rather that the science is highly specific to each individual patient or client. Thus, there exists a great lack of consensus among mental health professionals in this area. Additionally, the DSM-5 is inconclusive as to whether suicidal ideation and suicide behavior disorder are diagnosable mental health phenomena on a widespread basis. To be sure, there may be cases that warrant such specificity, but it does not yet logically follow that these possible diagnoses share widespread application because of their existence in some patients or clients. It is worthy of note that neither suicidal ideation nor suicide behavior disorder are treated as medical anomalies to be solved or eradicated. They are complex, persistent categories that are not cured in the same sense as athlete's foot or tuberculosis.

The way forward is a difficult one and will require a great deal of hard work and dedication by consumers, farmers, and policymakers. There is a need for state and regional governments to do more to provide resources and communication avenues for farmers seeking aid and not just in economic terms. Let us revisit the respectability and *eudaimonia* that farming once engendered. Abstraction of labour is a useful element for formulating an efficient agricultural infrastructure machine in today's globalizing world; however, it is not a useful element for preserving the well-being of on-the-ground workers in this setting.

Now that the landscape of farmer suicide in the United States has been examined, it is

time to turn to the same issue but on the other side of the world. There is a great deal of infrastructural crossover between the United States and India. Demand for fast production is present in both areas. Large-scale, factory farm structures are becoming more and more common along with westernized equipment and agricultural methodology.

In some respects, there is indeed a public push in India to become in-line with popular western consumer culture, if it is capable of being adapted to traditional Indian legal customs and religious tenets. In this environment, farmers are pushed to the periphery as they publicly vocalize their hardships and concerns. Compared to the overall market share price of agricultural goods, farmers end up making very little money. All of this can create a volatile environment of oppression and neglect.

CHAPTER 3

AGRICULTURE AND SUICIDE IN INDIA

It is machinery that has impoverished India.

Ghandi

The arbitrary boundaries between knowledge and ignorance are paralleled by arbitrary boundaries between value and non-value. The reductionist, mechanistic metaphor simultaneously creates the measure of value and the instruments for the annihilation of that which it considers non-value. It creates the possibility of colonizing and controlling that which is free and self-generative.

M. Mies and V. Shiva

At this point in history, India's complications with their agricultural industry are well-documented. Still dealing with the effects from the early 1900s British colonization and occupation (and the subsequent struggles of the Independence movement), India has entered into a new realm of politics in which religion has blended with liberal tenets.[85] For those living in the highly populated urban areas, political alignment and religion are a kind of social currency that varies from state to state. In some cities, it is tolerated to be Atheistic, Agnostic, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, etc. among India's Hindu majority. In other cities, these identifications can be unsafe. Rural farmers also participate in this marketplace of politics and religion, although from an increasingly marginalized field.

As anthropologist Kelly Alley notes with regard to rivers in India, India is moving towards a brand of resource nationalism. It is my position that this resource nationalism includes farming practices and structures as well as the water issues that Alley explores. Alley explains,

> .... the Indian state is experimenting with neoliberalism as a way to respond to more powerful strategies tied to centralized finance, and the push for privatization, deregulation, and free transnational trade...liberalization reforms have been slowly, not

[85] Kumar, Narender (Editor). *Politics and Religion in India*. New York: Routledge, 2020. pp. 3-5.

> abruptly, introduced to shift India from a fully planned, socialist economy to a neoliberal, resource nationalist one.[86]

Since the time Alley wrote this article about resources and water issues, India's neoliberal reform pace is no longer slow. As the COVID-19 pandemic tore through the Indian countryside, its government has been in a mad scramble to restructure itself in a way that can prevent economic collapse while also maintaining its image fitting western standards of progress and development. There are reports of India running out of resources for its crematoriums, and some communities have even reportedly taken to dumping the bodies of the deceased directly into rivers.[87] [88] The general public has been left without much leadership to speak of, besides the occasional authoritarian crackdowns by its prime minister. Farmers are still in protest around the nation's capital, even in the face of possible lethal COVID-19 infection.

In addition to resource nationalism, Alley also states,

> In global financing, the neoliberal model is driving the interests of funders who see a kind of futuristic value in laying out large capital for big risk projects that theoretically control the supply and price of vast resources.[89]

This control over supply and price includes the usual suspects like cotton, various kinds of rice, rubber, coffee, etc. What seems to be missing from scholarly discussion of these issues in India is the reality that farmers themselves are being treated as a controlled commodity.

The centralized government structure of India's major cities and capitol create extremely

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[86] Alley, Kelly. "Anthropology and Environmental Debate: Reflections on Science, Resource Nationalism, and News Reporting." *India Review*, 5:3-4 (2006): 458.

[87] Singh, Paras. "Delhi: Pushed to the limit, crematoria staring at acute wood shortage." *The Times of India*. 28 April 2021. Available from: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/pushed-to-the-limit-crematoria-staring-at-acute-wood-shortage/articleshow/82282020.cms.

[88] Pandey, Geeta. "India's holiest river Ganges is swollen with COVID victims." *BBC News.* 19 May 2021. Available from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57154564.

[89] Alley, Kelly. "Anthropology and Environmental Debate: Reflections on Science, Resource Nationalism, and News Reporting." *India Review*, 5:3-4 (2006): 460.

high population density that can abruptly drop off no more than 15 miles or so away from the city center. The wealthy occupy lavish houses with well-manicured landscapes and coveted views of the countryside, while the working-class poor starve just a few miles down the road. For many mega-cities around the world, this is a common narrative. As I would discover over nearly a two-year period of research, rural Indian farmers were also closely connected with this dynamic of disparity.

I had seen this for myself while spending nearly a month in various Indian cities before the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down. I do not include the family name or area out of respect for their privacy, but I was invited to dinner at an extremely nice home in a gated area. This home had over six luxury cars, full-service waiting staff, and some of the greenest grass I had ever seen. To get to this house, we drove through a number of unfinished low-income housing projects with so many poor and starving people that I lost count of them. In a country where clean water access and dependable utilities are at a premium, living situations like this are virtually unheard of.

I learned this the hard way in my first week when I developed dysentery from water that people told me would be fine. A high percentage of Indians drink bottled water for this reason, if they can afford it. Against my environmentally friendly conscience and education, I found myself joining them. With every bottle of water I bought, I was reminded of my level of privilege back home, rarely if ever having to worry about such problems. Water access has become such a difficult issue that New Delhi has water turn on and shut off times. As recently as May 2021, New Delhi is even having to extend these turn on and shut off times to include

essential infrastructure, like hospitals.[90]

Such a mix is an eclectic blend of socioeconomic status, political alignment, religion, caste (although Indian officials will swear that the caste system is not around anymore), industry, and agriculture. On the footsteps of Palitana in the state of Gujarat, a nearly solid marble holy pilgrimage site for Jains comprising over 800 individual temples, I had the most delicious coconut that I have ever tasted in my entire life. It cost a mere 25 rupees, which is the equivalent to roughly 30 U.S. cents. I found out that the cart salesman had purchased this coconut from a local farmer, which meant that the farmer would be getting even less than the 25 rupees I paid. No matter who I asked, no one was able to tell me how much farmers make off of such transactions, only that it was "very little." This experience accelerated my interest in Indian farming issues.

Having said this, we can exercise caution regarding the loose usage of "religion" to classify what may appear as religious tendencies in India.[91] At closest, the politics in India show a kind of religiosity that operates differently than many western habits. If you ask Indian locals about the political and religious mix in the country, many of them will tell you that it is a "melting pot" similar to that of the United States. While it is true that religious affiliations are mobilized in many places for political reasons, including the U.S., the degree to which this mobilization occurs alongside politics is something that I had not experienced before traveling in India myself.

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[90] Bhalla, Gursharan. "Now, Water Shortage in Delhi? Will Have To Cut Supply To Hospitals, Says Delhi Jal Board." *India Times*. 5 May 2021. Available from: https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/now-water-shortage-in-delhi-will-have-to-cut-supply-to-hospitals-says-delhi-jal-board-539829.html.

[91] It would be inappropriate to utilize "religion" loosely in order to classify behavior in India. To do so would need to ignore a long and brutal western history with the word's origins (Latin: *religio*) and the politics attached to these origins. Over time, religion has come to represent particular Abrahamic tendences in the areas of piety, worship, ritual, etc. This has remained true ever since Friedrich Max Müller's 19th-century work on

Despite India's self-proclaimed aim towards national secularism, its governmental practice, both at the national and state levels, tells quite a different story. While it is not the aim of this work to provide metrics for such religiosity, the social structure byproducts and politicization of this religiosity are important to understanding the overall *milieu* in India and subsequently its farmers. Because of western economic and political influence on India during this globalizing time, talks following the vein of "separation of church and state" have become more popular there. While the "separation of church and state" in the western hemisphere is a toss-up as to its efficacy, it is even more the case in India at the moment.[92]

Issues of disparity and inequality have renewed academic interests in ethical dilemmas across India. In comparison between India and the west, many scholars have started revisiting the question, "What of ethics?" Like the terms "religion" or "anthropology," it is good academic practice to consider whether ethics is an invention of western persuasion. Taken broadly as a study of habits and values, the answer seems to be, "no." These are important questions to consider given farmer suicide, as it is in part a comparative ethical question and requires such an awareness of sociocultural context. Bilimoria et al. explore this dynamic, among other comparative links between the west and India. The authors argue that while it may not appear as neatly packed as some western presentations and theoretical foundations of ethics, Indian use of *dharma* carries much of the same weight and practical power as the western study of habits.[93] This has in turn provided an abundance of fruitful dialogue regarding to what extent *dharma* is deontological, utilitarian, etc.

[92] For example: The ongoing indebtedness of governors and senators to conservative Christian groups in the Bible Belt region of the United States.

[93] Bilimoria, Purusottama, Joseph Prabhu, and Renuka M. Sharma. *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. pp. 14-7.

We can exercise care to avoid historically colonialist arguments involving an essentializing character of Indian thought. Just as Ronald Inden argues in his famous 1990 book, *Imagining India*, there has been a tradition in the west to generalize Indian frameworks under such umbrellas as: singular Indian culture, the Hindu mind, the imaginational rather than rational, etc.[94] This is neither accurate in terms of its representation of ideas from Indian scholars and communities nor is it conducive to undoing imperialism.

The intellectual landscape in India consists of many pluralistic intellectual landscapes, just as one may find in any other part of the world. In the face of recent political efforts at national identity politics, India's diverse populations and worldviews carry with them an inherent resistance to such perceived homogenization and political mobilization. This resistance is the impetus that has persuaded India's prime minister to move in favor of more authoritarian forms of governance as of late.

To further corroborate Inden's point, Richard King's 1999 book *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* highlights potential ambiguity in defining colonialist and orientalist practices. Critiques of colonialism exist to point out mechanisms, logics, and politics that place colonizing forces in positions of power over colonized people or areas.[95] Some counters to these critiques of colonialism and orientalism spend a great deal of time pointing out orientalists or colonists that had good intentions, as if this exonerates orientalism or colonialism as a whole. Since it is not the point of an analysis of orientalism or colonialism to broadly categorize all westerners as such, this missed the point entirely.

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[94] Inden, Ronald. *Imagining India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. pp. 263-4.

[95] King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East."* London: Routledge, 1999. pp. 89-91.

Similar to King's point, this dissertation does not mean to categorize everyone in charge of the agricultural system as negligent or bad people. Instead of doing this, this dissertation aims to critically illuminate areas where the discourse, philosophy, and politics can be changed to be more compassionate and inclusive to farmers. *Ad hominem* does very little to change things in the world. While it can be important to name the people, corporations, etc. that exacerbate these issues, assigning blame serves a different function altogether. Let us instead keep the focus on infrastructure while also maintaining focus on what forces maintain such an infrastructure.

In the vast majority of Indian thinking, *dharma* is "polysemic" in its use and application. That is, like the habits and language of Ancient Attic Greek, terms can have many definitions given different linguistic and social contexts. Some scholars have assigned *dharma* meanings of law, karmic order, ethics, duty, etc. just to name a few. We can also have a personal *dharma* situated within a social *dharma*. I think the easiest readily available comparison that *dharma* has with western philosophy is in Aristotle's theoretical notion of a formal soul, found in *De Anima*. The physical extension of one's being is bound together with the psyche in such a way that it moves one to live. The formal soul's full actuality is colloquially known as one's "purpose" or "final cause." What one does to the body affects the actuality of the soul and vice versa, all within a greater cultural *telos*.

This link puzzles me greatly when it comes to farmer suicide in India. In a nation that has such a rich history examining the connections between the body and soul, why is it that farmer suicide and disparity suddenly becomes *only* an economic issue? Since when have problems of *dharma* and psyche primarily been problems of money? Am I to believe that Arjuna's struggles of the mind and body in *Bhagavad Gita* were a result of imbalanced finances? Am I to believe that the *dharmashastra* texts and their treatment of suicide, in its cases of allowance or

prohibition, are a result of narrow economy as well? I think not, and India's broader cultural history provides a much more complex association between life and death than this. We can revisit a dynamic view of body and soul as an exercise in disentanglement from westernized mechanistic philosophy and contemporary neoliberal pressures.

One of the major contributors to this social-political *milieu* is India's emergent *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalist) movement. This nationalist view, popularized and ignited by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), has pushed an agenda of polarization and insulation since the mid-1980s.[96] India's Prime Minister since 2014, Narendra Modi, is a flourishing member of this party. Although there are mixed reports as to whether COVID-19 may have changed Modi's degree of control, it is still clear that contenders to the BJP are in limited supply.

There is a type of incongruent political relationship here.[97] On the one hand, India's government seems to want to entertain many liberal tenets popularized by western capitalism and industry.[98] On the other hand, India's government seems to want to maintain an image of Hindu nationalist identity, a nationalism which can be seen as antithetical to the basic western liberal endorsements of freedom and liberty. To complicate matters even further, India has two major agricultural hurdles: its massive population with an equally massive wealth gap. This political incongruence maps directly onto India's farming infrastructure and practices in which farmers are caught in a bind between maintaining local, traditional means of farming and acquiescing to western agricultural influence in the name of western utilitarian efficiency.

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[96] Kumar, Narender (Editor). *Politics and Religion in India*. New York: Routledge, 2020. pp 78-81.

[97] This is to say that this political relationship resembles a split in the mind. The projected aims and goals that India's government professes do not align with the outcomes of its actions.

[98] Note that while these western liberal tenets may prove situationally better than some of their alternatives, they are not inherently so.

In this difficult time, India is presented with three main options as a response to its politics and agricultural state of affairs. These options will likely become further complicated as COVID-19 continues to spread throughout India. As much as I would prefer to think that the Indian government will have no problem curbing the infection rates, this does not appear to be the case, and surrounding infrastructure is suffering greatly. I have a few friends and acquaintances living in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, and it pains me to see them in so much distress.

The following three choices are the dilemmas that the Indian government finds itself faced with:

1.) Adopt all westernized methods of agriculture and politics in the interest of linear efficiency and the ability to provide to over 1.3 billion people. The consequence of this option is likely another colonizing loss of Indian cultural practice and values (the first major contemporary instance resulting from India's colonization relationship with Britain). India's rural farmers and indigenous groups would pay the highest price for this approach.

2.) Adopt some westernized methods of agriculture while maintaining some historically Indian ways of farming. Although many of India's cash-crop industries are state-regional specific, the coordination needed to pull this option off is unlikely given the large scale of things. It would require a utilitarian agreement and consensus as to the criteria for what should be "saved" and what should be "sacrificed" in terms of agricultural and political resources and knowledge. Given the predominant *Hindutva* voice in the government, a democratic negotiation of these criteria is unlikely.

3.) Adopt no westernized methods of agriculture and insulate India's traditional methods from outside influence. In order for this approach to feed India's population and also maintain its knowledge-sovereignty, India would have to change its scope of consumption away from western liberal tenets. Unfortunately, one of the main liberal tenets that comes with embracing western capitalist, neoliberal systems is a perceived entitlement to mass consumer culture. This simply cannot be maintained with a population of over 1.3 billion people.

As we can see, none of these three options are ideal. Nevertheless, a choice must be made in the coming decades if the well-being of India's citizens and its farmers is to improve. Stagnation and status quo are unsustainable in the long term in such a polarized state.

Quite unfortunately for its local farmers, it seems that recent news points to India's interest in the first option. Three contentious bills were introduced that open farming markets to private investors. Previously, India's government was the only major entity allowed to buy and stockpile agricultural goods (in case of natural disasters, famine, terrorism, etc.). However, these bills would allow private interests to also participate in purchasing and stockpiling agricultural products.[99] The central worry here is that if these private interests are also allowed into this system, the economic field, so to speak, would be ripe for market manipulation and abuse. Farmers were previously guaranteed certain market minimums by the Indian government, and it is not clear if these minimums are still guaranteed by private entities under the new laws. The protests around this legislation are ongoing, with much of New Delhi in gridlock. There are some resistance movements spread throughout the countryside, and many of these resistance movements intersect with other marginalized groups.[100] It remains to be seen whether such protests and gridlock will grant farmers the ears of their politicians.

Vandana Shiva and Gandhian Roots

With respect to farming, philosophy, and "on-the-ground" movements in India, Vandana Shiva's works on feminism, biopiracy, and seed sovereignty are important here. While I do not agree with some of Shiva's anti-technological, curative foods, or political claims, I understand her philosophical perspective, and her historical and philosophical work on the conditions of the working-class poor and indigenous in India are essential to understanding this problem of

[99] BBC News. "Farm bills: Are India's new reforms a 'death warrant' for farmers?" 23 September 2020. Available from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-54233080.

[100] For example, the Indian government does not have a good history with its Muslims, Sikhs, lower class, working poor, or political asylum seekers. The "Hindus first" movement set by the BJP is a massively scaled unification effort on paper, and the group has made repeated historical claims to peace and tolerance. In practice, such unification efforts have resulted in further marginalization for minority groups.

suicide.

In the chapter "Decolonizing the North" from *Ecofeminism*, Shiva states that the early goals of European colonization of India were to civilize its people and assimilate them into a perceived "developed" way of living.[101] So the narrative goes, India was so-called Third World, and Europe was going to show it the way to a brighter and more "enlightened" future. Now that a great deal of time has passed since the British Raj, it is clear that a transition into brighter futures was not really the case at all. Rather, this colonization was an enterprise of subjugation and oppression masquerading as a noble expedition into infrastructure and quality of life improvement. The burdens of such a colonization in India are not equally distributed among caste, age, sex, etc.

Today, these types of subjugation and oppression take less obvious forms than physical invasion and occupation. Economic enterprise in India is becoming more western capitalistic by the day, and the increase in capitalistic tendencies is leading to a higher emphasis on consumer culture. This emphasis on western capitalism is not entirely freely chosen. It is a utilitarian response to the path of least resistance for a nation that has quite a few serious compounding issues. Through more indirect means, like organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, countries with higher fluid capital can pressure other countries that require assistance. Agreements through these agencies are rarely democratically negotiated, and the country with the upper hand going into the arrangement almost always maintains such a power balance throughout the transaction. Many farmers have to sell their land and business in order to pay off impossible debts to equipment manufacturers and large corporations, which is even more so with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[101] Mies, Maria and Shiva, Vandana. *Ecofeminism*. New York: Zed Books. Ltd., [1993] 2014. pp. 264-5.

With more than 50% of India's workforce employed by farming, the prevalence of suicide is likely to increase in face of scarcity and production complications, unless infrastructural approaches are drastically changed. It is also worthy of note how much India's farmers supply in terms of exports to other parts of the globe. In this last fiscal year, India's agricultural exports have totaled 2.54 lakh crore rupees, which translates from its Vedic numbering system to roughly 3.4 billion U.S. dollars.[102] This accounts for a sizable chunk of the global rice, grain, etc. exported to many other regions.

In two additional works, the first being *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* and the second being *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace,* Shiva highlights cases in which western agricultural enterprises have attempted to patent seed varieties in India to gain control. In these cases, it would mean that farmers using seeds that are off patent would be committing theft and infringement on intellectual property.[103] In effect, farmers are pigeon-holed into buying mass-produced, non-indigenous seeds. Sometimes, these seeds are even designed to terminate at the end of their growth period so that farmers are forced to buy new seeds all over again. Such western pressures would have an unrelenting grip on India's agricultural lifelines through this international policy, and it is not as simple for farmers as merely choosing another supplier. Options have become limited.

Some areas and groups in India have resisted such outside influences, attempting to safeguard their local, indigenous ways of life. With regard to the legal right to "enclose" biological, intellectual, and digital commons, Shiva explains,

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[102] Sally, Madhvi. "India's agricultural export grows: Economic Survey." *Economic Times*. 29 January 2021. Available from: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/indias-agricultural-export-grows-economic-survey/articleshow/80585995.cms?from=mdr.

[103] Shiva, Vandana. *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*. California: North Atlantic Books, [1999] 2016. p. vii-viii.

> Enclosures create exclusions, and these exclusions are the hidden cost of corporate globalization. Our movements against the biopiracy of neem, of basmati, of wheat have aimed at and succeeded in reclaiming our collective biological and intellectual heritage as a commons. Movements such as the victorious struggle started by the tribal women of a tiny hamlet called Plachimada in India's Kerala state against one of the world's largest corporations, Coca-Cola, are at the heart of the emerging earth democracy.[104]

Shiva includes other examples from large corporations like Texas-based RiceTec's basmati patent as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and American chemical business W.R. Grace's attempts to patent Indian neem tree oils and usage. There is a problematic international history here, and it does not appear to be going away any time soon. Shiva further states,

> Earth Democracy allows us to reclaim our common humanity and our unity with all life. Earth Democracy relocates the sanctity of life in all beings and all people irrespective of class, gender, religion, or caste. And it redefines 'upholding family values' as respecting the limits on greed and violence set by belonging to the earth family. Family values of the earth family do not allow for the privatization of water or the patenting of life, since all beings have a right to life and well-being.[105]

Over the last 20 to 30 years, Shiva appears to be establishing a kind of broad, worldly citizenship, although "citizenship" proper may not be the correct term considering Shiva's Gandhian influences and rejection of such conventional western notions of citizenship. What is clear is that this Earth Democracy is a type of cosmopolitan shift away from westernized, euro-centric cosmos to a more decentralized model. If successful, this is an ingenious move for resisting present-day colonial and neoliberal pressures, both from within and outside of India itself. Decentralizing the support network for farmers is a needed measure in the face of such centralized corporate power and wealth. As I can lessen the pressure by increasing the surface area of an object in physics, so too can farmers lessen the political pressure by increasing the number and geographical spread of their support structures.

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[104] *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. California: North Atlantic Books, [2005] 2015. p. 3.

[105] *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. California: North Atlantic Books, [2005] 2015. p. 7.

As far as the economic situation in India, it has turned to western models of growth in its determination of national worth. Shiva points out,

> Two economic myths facilitate a separation between two intimately linked processes: the growth of affluence and the growth of poverty. Firstly, growth is viewed only as growth of capital. What goes unperceived is the destruction in nature and in people's subsistence economy that this growth creates. The two simultaneously created 'externalities' of growth….[106]

I would challenge Shiva's words here in that I do not think these factors are unperceived at all. Rather, the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of this capitalist growth model abstract labour and work in such a way that this infrastructural model is *designed from the start* to actively perceive and disregard such collateral destruction. It is *exitium vitae* in its most mechanical and systemic form. This is not a matter of ignorance and education as they relate to praxis and environment. The agricultural infrastructure itself can be reformed, integrally, alongside any change in attitudes or awareness. Infrastructural status quo means more one-sided dependency frameworks for farmers, less adaptability to seasonal challenges, and further bottlenecking of feasible supply options. It is also not feasible for farmers and consumers to simply stop participating in the current agricultural model, despite its oppressive nature.

Not long ago, I had the privilege to attend and learn from Vandana Shiva's Biodiversity Conservation Farm (*Navdanya*) in Uttarakhand before the COVID-19 pandemic. I was not sure what to expect, as I had read quite a lot of Shiva's work at that point, but I was also aware of various controversies involving the triad of Shiva, the Indian government, and external agricultural interests. At the biodiversity conservation farm, I learned that Shiva's establishment had a few self-proclaimed views which are important to understanding seed sovereignty as well as farmer suicide.

[106] Mies, Maria and Shiva, Vandana. *Ecofeminism*. New York: Zed Books. Ltd., [1993] 2014. p. 268.

First is its endorsement of Gandhian social structuring and small-scale sustainability. Gandhi famously espoused strong attitudes of self-rule in self-sufficiency (i.e. *swaraj*) as foils to the western industrial empire reaching towards India in the early 1900s. In Gandhi's framework, self-rule is just as important, or perhaps even more important than broader, social rule.[107] While self-rule does involve emphasizing modesty and humility, the connection is deeper than behavioral changes. One is not merely a cog or node in a larger scheme; one is reciprocally essential to the sovereignty of the system itself. The value of the individual and the value of the whole are one.[108] In this way, it is a kind of anti-alienation from labor, in Marxist terms, if you will. Such Gandhian self-rule is in tandem rather than juxtaposed to Shiva's Earth Democracy model.

Second, farmers in India create a network of assistance and shared knowledge that is independent from mega-scale farming and corporate influence. They accomplish this through sharing seed bank preservation methods and the means to construct safe water wells, natural pesticide alternatives, etc. Even if one or a small group of farmers were to lose their seeds to disease, political pressures, fire, terrorism, etc., these seeds could theoretically be recovered by support of other farmers in this local network. They would no longer rely on companies attempting to gain monopolies on seed varieties, not to mention the terrible enterprise of terminator seed industries designed to create such supply dependency. If one is familiar with the global seed bank efforts in Svalbard, Norway, then one may imagine this same sort of basic preservation premise but spread out over many smaller seed banks rather than one large central

[107] Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj, or, Indian Home Rule*. Madras: S. Ganesan & Co, 1921. pp. 52-4.

[108] Perhaps this element of Gandhi's politics is a theoretical microcosmic reflection of Gandhi's Hindu upbringing, in which the individual *Brahman* is intimately linked in macrocosm with "The Creator," *Brahma*.

bank.[109] Instead of claiming or renting space for these seeds, Indian farmers recognize their mutual survivability and connectivity as a commons.

These efforts will become even more important as India opens its formerly protected agricultural industry to private investors and possible market manipulation. Its government has pointed to economic stability and liberal progress as reasons for allowing such private interests unprecedented control in its agricultural system. Many experts suspect that the allure of giant profit margins is the primary motivator here at the expense of farmers themselves. Time will tell, although if one is to learn anything from the history of such economic moves in other parts of the globe, this process will not be kind to the poor working class in India. Not long ago, water sources themselves entered the market as a commodity for the first time. The influence and links that tradable water commodities may have on farmer suicide are beyond the scope of this work, although it will be a crucial area of scholarship in the future. Other independent farming resources, products, and support will be soon to follow India's same commodity trends.

Gandhi and Citizenship

Although Gandhi did not have a bona fide framework on citizenship, he did have many commonly expressed views on communal unity. I believe that a philosophical framework of citizenship and autonomy (i.e. *swaraj*) can be extrapolated from this to help understand the intricacies of the farmer suicide crisis. Indian history scholar Ornit Shani describes the three main conceptions of citizenship present in India as liberal, republican, and ethno-nationalist. Specifically, Shani elaborates,

[109] The most recent instance of this seed bank put to use was in the case of war-torn Syria. When nations face such destruction and desolation, they can lean on these seed banks to restore some of their indigenous agriculture. The seed bank in Svalbard does not allow for genetically modified seeds, and local seed banks in India follow the same practice.

> The liberal conception of citizenship views the individual as the bearer of a package of rights, designed to protect his/her personal liberties. On its face, the liberal conception of citizenship is the most inclusive and universalistic. The republican citizenship concept, in turn, contains the notion of a common good that is prior to the individual citizen and his/her interests.... In the ethno-nationalist notion of citizenship membership in the nation is above all defined by a descent group, which can be based on blood ties or cultural affiliation.[110]

Shani further suggests that Gandhi's framework possesses a fourth way to citizenship, which is paradoxically a kind of non-state citizenship. This is enmeshed in a deontological framework of duties opposed to neoliberal rights.

While this may sound nice on paper for the purposes of re-envisioning political philosophy and its relationship with western pressures, it has a dire potential consequence for India's poor farmers. There is a very large logical problem with all four of these conceptions of citizenship as they relate to farmers on-the-ground. Farmers in India do not have the right to their own life in this political arrangement, which is a necessary logical precursor to liberal, republican, ethno-nationalist, and non-state conceptions of citizenship. Out of simplicity and clarity, I direct the reader to consult Chapter 3 of this work for further theoretical fine details of why many farmers do not possess such practical rights to their own lives.

In order to reject the traditional concepts of citizenship, of liberal, republican, and ethno-nationalist, it is necessary to have the ability and control to formally and practically decide whether and how one may live. Farmers have neither the formal nor practical control of their livelihood in India in this way. It may be countered that farmers do have control over their livelihood by virtue of their liberty and freedom within the social contract with the state. This is true, on paper and with respect to theoretical frameworks. I am not speaking to the preemptive nature of a political arrangement like this; I am speaking to the current practical reality. One may

[110] Shani, Ornit. "Gandhi, citizenship and the resilience of Indian nationhood." *Citizenship Studies*, 15:6-7, 2011: 661.

enter into a citizenship "contract" in quite a different way than one may *bring the political realizations to fruition* in such a contract. This speaks to the difference between an *equal* conceptualization of citizenship and an *equitable* conceptualization of citizenship. Everyone has an equal relationship to citizenship, as everyone starts at the same place on paper. Few have an equitable relationship to citizenship, in comparison.

To the reader unaware of these issues, this may sound hyperbolic and exaggerated for the sake of my arguments. The harsh reality in India is that many poor farmers rely on a combination of luck and proper government infrastructure oversight as to whether their families will survive the year. There are regular accounts in India of male farm owners taking their own lives to pay off debts or pass insurance money to their dependents. This has magnified from the COVID-19 pandemic gridlock and India's growing population concerns.

In the face of this void wrought by suicide, there emerges a new binary. It is an ultimate no-saying to oppression alongside an ultimate yes-saying to sovereignty. I cannot think of a better example of existential angst than this. The final act of taking one's life is a desperate attempt by farmers to reclaim control. A move in the direction of non-state citizenship *reinforces* rather than *remedies* an issue such as farmer suicide for those with limited political mobility.

It is important to take care in understanding Gandhi's theoretical direction and logical trajectory differently. To be clear, *swaraj*, autonomy, or self-rule means a kind of discipline and self-sufficiency *as it is pitted against colonial pressure*. The divorce *swaraj* from this historicization is to study self-rule in a sociopolitical vacuum. *Swaraj* is not a baseline state of being that can exist outside of such a complex framework, as is implied in the case of an outright rejection of citizenship. *Swaraj*, for farmers especially, is negative and deconstructive in its formal arguments. In the same way that individual liberty and freedom imply the negative

constraints met when encountering the liberty and freedom of others, *swaraj* is codependent with the colonial citizenship it attempts to denounce. As both a device and way of life, it loudly and repeatedly says, "No!" to the colonizer who is enmeshed in the same infrastructure, the messy lifeworld that perpetuates *animal laborans* and *homo faber*. For Gandhi, the village was the central unit from which this self-rule and resistance may be realized.[111] While it would certainly be *preferable* that the changes in the village lead to changes beyond it, it does not *necessarily* follow that this is the case.

In postcolonial studies, there has already been a similar notion to this codependency dovetailed with liberal concepts of cosmopolitanism and citizenship.[112] In a 2015 text *Orientalism, Terrorism, Indigenism: South Asian Readings in Postcolonialism*, Pavan Kumar Malreddy argues,

> Postcolonial cosmopolitanism, thus, entails the recognition that local cultures are active producers of place and geography rather than mere extensions of the metropolis; what constitutes the local serves as the site of cosmopolitan imagination by virtue of the colonial encounter: that is, resistance and inheritance.[113]

As a result, this postcolonial cosmopolitanism resists the idea that there is one world citizenship in which homogenization occurs. Even with the best of liberal multicultural intentions, such an all-encompassing view repeats the microcosmic colonizer/colonized duality on a macrocosmic scaling. Views such as "One world, one people" or even "One nation, one India" erase the specificity and individual struggles of those who have limited autonomy and agency from the

[111] Chapple, Christopher and Tucker, Mary Evelyn. *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000. pp. 223-4.

[112] Postcolonial studies and decolonial studies are closely related in their approaches and subject matter. Some scholars draw the distinction at geographical boundaries, with the postcolonial related to South Asia and India and decolonial related to the Americas and Africa. Others use the two categories interchangeably.

[113] Malreddy, Pavan Kumar. *Orientalism, Terrorism, Indigenism: South Asian Readings in Postcolonialism*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2015. p. 91.

outset. Saying that the members of the village help to constitute the nation is not logically or socio-politically the same as saying that the nation is wholly representative of its people. The two neither biconditionally nor compositionally necessitate one another.

Farmers in India, especially today, do not have the luxury to willingly don the veil of ignorance needed for such a broad cosmopolitan assimilation. Large-scale agricultural infrastructure rejects the sovereignty and *eudaimonia* of farmers in the service of "the greater good," without democratically delineating precisely what constitutes "good" or who may be counted in "greater." The dynamic is like Atlas holding the heavens aloft as his punishment, only farmers are holding the world on which only others may experience such proposed widespread belonging and connection.

Data, Power, and Myth

So how bad is farmer suicide in India in terms of actual statistics and numbers? In a major study from 2014, Kennedy and King show that among farmers in India, the percentage of marginalized farmers does not necessarily become significant to male suicide rate. However, cash crop percentage and indebtedness do each become significant to male suicide rate. Furthermore, when marginal farmers, cash crop, and indebtedness are all taken into account, all three together become significant to male suicide rate.[114] What this means is that both the *scale* of farming and the *crop content* are major factors in influencing hardship and suicide risk, as a result of complex systemic struggle.

As a short side note, I take a brief moment to address the issue of farm ownership itself in India. The vast majority of farms in India are owned by men, and as a result, the suicide statistics

[114] Kennedy, Jonathan and King, Lawrence. "The political economy of farmers' suicides in India: indebted cash-crop farmers with marginal landholdings explain state-level variation in suicide rates." *Globalization and Health*, 2014, 10:16, pp. 3-6.

are incomplete as they relate to gender. Some of this patriarchy is due to long-maintained cultural traditions in India, and some of this patriarchy is due to perceived economic legitimacy of a farm business. In most rural, conservative areas of India, men are the leaders of the household as well as the leaders of family businesses. Rajkumar et al. add to India's suicide number data by stating "Recent studies from India, using verbal autopsies... have documented high suicide rates (95/100,000), compared to the official national average (10/100,000). These studies have also identified very high suicide rates in young women, and among the elderly."[115] I would be interested to see if this data trends in the same fashion once under the filter of farmer suicide.

There are of course exceptions to this dynamic, Shiva's farm is owned by women for example, but the widespread reality is quite obviously uneven in terms of gender power balance and agency. Women are estimated to grow as much as 80% of India's food, despite not owning the farms themselves.[116] In some cases this appears to be the consequence of men leaving rural areas in search of more money in cities. In other cases, it is not clear what accounts for such imbalance in farm structure.

Furthermore, farmer suicide is often cast aside as a minority problem or one of small, specific social groupings. The current research data does not support this reductionist claim. Suicide rates and prevalence follow farm infrastructure design scale and crop type, which do not correlate with such minimizing claims to minority issues. The problem is widespread, infrastructural, systemic, and not a collection of infrequent, isolated instances. Rajkumar et al.

[115] Rajkumar, Anto P. et al. "Associations between the Macroeconomic Indicators and Suicide Rates in India: Two Ecological Studies." *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 37:3 (2015): 277.

[116] Das, Shreyasee and Kamdar, Bansari. "Women grow as much as 80% of India's food – but its new farm laws overlook their struggles." *The Conversation*. 11 March 2021. Available from: https://theconversation.com/women-grow-as-much-as-80-of-indias-food-but-its-new-farm-laws-overlook-their-struggles-155083.

further suggest that when it comes to farmer suicide, "Macro-economic factors... play a major role. There is a need to examine macroeconomic policies and their implications in more detail to develop effective policies to curtail national suicide rates in India."[117] While the general openness to new policies and economic re-evaluation is admirable, economic abstraction of labour and valuation are negative contributors to farmer suicide rather than its saving grace.

This reductionist rhetoric can become difficult to disaggregate from narratives about suicide per region, as suicide has now become politicized within India itself. In some ways, politicization and attention both provide legitimacy to such farmer suicide problems. In other ways, the field of view of farmer suicide becomes clouded by this politicization and attention. It is a double-edged sword. In a 2019 article affiliated with the British Medical Association, Armstrong et al. draw attention to some instances where media outlets in India disproportionately overreported extreme cases of suicide, agriculturally related suicide, student suicide, etc.[118] Such political mobilization and response bias to the suffering of others is making it more difficult to keep narratives accurate among the general public in India.

All of this certainly creates an uphill battle when adding India's practically non-existent mental healthcare system into the mix. Suicide is commonly treated as a physical medical exception rather than a prolonged existential or psychological state of being. Facilities can be difficult or impossible to utilize, especially for those who live in the more rural areas of the country. Many are left with no regular access to mental health care apart from the limited collection of suicide hotline numbers available to the public. Rural farming communities do their

[117] Rajkumar, Anto P. et al. "Associations between the Macroeconomic Indicators and Suicide Rates in India: Two Ecological Studies." *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 37:3 (2015): 278.

[118] Armstrong, G. et al. "Mass Media Representation of Suicide in A High Suicide State in India: An Epidemiological Comparison with Suicide Deaths in the Population." *BMJ Open*, 9:7 (2019): 1-7.

best to support one another, but this is often not enough.

As a result of this limited mental health infrastructure, coupled with failing agricultural infrastructure, suicide study data coming out of India is also narrow. In a 2019 study from *Crisis*, a journal devoted to studying suicide, Arya et al. found that religion, caste, tribal identity, and other social and cultural factors are neglected in suicide research in India itself.[119] Arya et al. further argue that suicide in India contains elements of heterogeneity and intersection between social, economic, and cultural factors. India's state is failing their farmers in this core area of care, as its overwhelming center of attention has been on economic disparity and interest. The suicide problem is much broader and more dynamic than matters of debt and economic prosperity.

As an additional resource to Shiva's political and cultural analysis, religion scholar Whitney Sanford's work on agriculture in India and the United States is quite helpful in showing how the local practice is bound together with outside pressure. In *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*, Sanford states,

> Proponents of industrial agriculture justify current practices with claims of high productivity, yet they rarely acknowledge that this system also produces environmental degradation, social instability, and hunger.[120]

This kind of justification is expensive for Indian farmers, both in terms of economics and in terms of existential well-being. While narratives of "saving the population" or "modernizing" are quite pervasive among politicians and government figures in charge of top-down changes, Indian farmers are suffering and dying in order to make these narratives a reality for the rest of the

[119] Arya, Vikas et al. "The Geographic Heterogeneity of Suicide Rates in India by Religion, Caste, Tribe, and Other Backwards Classses." *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention* in partnership with the American Psychological Association, 40:5 (2019): 370-4.

[120] Sanford, A. Whitney and Shiva, Vandana. *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. p. 28.

State. Sanford continues by explaining that India's ".... industrial agriculture and the resulting degradation demonstrate the need for new stories" in which myth and metaphor provide normative structures for agricultural practice.[121] I would supplement Sanford's claims so that in addition to the call for new stories, current times call for greater critical illumination of the agricultural infrastructure and logical background in which these stories may exist in the first place. In constructing new, more inclusive ways of thinking and speaking of our relationships with agriculture, we necessarily deconstruct old ways as well. The necessary duality of *homo faber* and *homo non faber* resurfaces once again.

How do stories connect with myths? Popular culture parrots myths as fictions or convenient lies to shroud the "true" reality of the world. Logically speaking, this is only one possible way to conceptualize myths. This view, that myths are fake, false, or even outright deceitful at times, is a function of western enlightenment thinking and is not the only way. Myths and narratives are ways of expressing parts of one's life that may be difficult to articulate in everyday vernacular. They are artistic approximations that are neither true nor false; they simply are as a consequence of feast and famine, in this case.

My philosophy students often ask whether the Ancient Greeks or Indo-Aryans really believed in their stories and myths as truth, as though there were cultural truth arbiters patrolling the mouths of poets and lyricists to check for validity and consistency. If the last sections of Plato's *Republic* are to be taken literally, then I suppose my students may not have been far off the mark.[122] Perhaps the mental imagery of the war between Olympus and the Titans in

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[121] Sanford, A. Whitney and Shiva, Vandana. *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. p. 28.

[122] In the final sections of *Republic*, Plato speaks of casting out the poets and some artists from the city. This is presumably because poets and artists are so difficult to censor coupled with the fact that poetry and art command so much emotional attention. If the senses and emotions can overwhelm one's ability to reason, then it follows that Plato would be worried in such a way. It is also curious however that Plato himself was quite poetic and artistic,

Theogony or whether Arjuna really had to fight his own kin in *Bhagavad Gita* both seem too fantastical and out of reach. This is missing the overarching point, however. The fact is that these myths and narratives were the ways that people interacted and interpreted their life problems as well as their successes. Therein was the potential to grasp complex and difficult subject matter in a way that was also open to change and adaptation over time. The same is still the case today. The agricultural infrastructure narrative can be changed alongside production alternatives to include the voices of farmers.

Let me be clear that I am not suggesting some social formulation of restoration ecology here. When environmental problems are raised, whether these are related to agriculture and suicide or not, it is in vogue today to assume an outright rejection of the present in favor of the past. Many are creatures of nostalgia in this way. People like the memory and sacred image they have of chocolate ice cream, trips to tranquil lakes, or even a pre-COVID-19 world and lament the dilution of those prior experiences over time. There is no clearly defined infrastructural pre-concept to the present atmosphere of suicide to which one may return. Rather than focus on returning to such romantic mesmers, the current infrastructural logic and conditions themselves can create an environment in which the risk of extreme struggle and suicide are mitigated among farmers.

I reiterate that this goes beyond economics. A mitigation of this kind can guard against the solidification of industrial narrative structures that have maintained the continued degradation of farmers in India as well as the United States. Such a process requires constant adaptation and revisitation amidst pointed critique. The *milieu* of farmer suicide as it relates to

leaving the reader to wonder why Plato would either 1.) cast himself out of his own city or 2.) provide some kind of *ad hoc* exception in his case. The "true meaning" of such dialogue is impossible to decipher, as Plato did not follow such a linear representation of truth in narrative or dialogue.

agricultural infrastructure operates as a negative dialectical relationship rather than a positive dialectical relationship.[123] The marginalization and oppression of farmers is bound up with the conceptual inadequacies of the system itself.

I argue this because there is a real danger behind romanticizing one's relationship with nature and agriculture. In a logical sleight-of-hand, it can be all too easy to fixate on perfect images of the past that were never really there in the first place. We can be attentive to the voices of farmers today while also envisioning more promising futures. The political superpowers of the world, India included, are once again in an arms-race of utilitarian efficiency with little attention paid to the systemic costs of such efficiency. This danger to romanticize becomes even more pronounced as scale increases. When farmers raise their voices in anguish and protest, they are often met with tone deaf responses. Every day, the impoverished *eudaimonia* of those in one particular region is necessarily sacrificed in order to preserve the sacred character of another. Sanford supports this claim by arguing,

> Romanticized concepts of the natural world—whether wilderness or pastoral—are problematic because they have enabled the construct of dichotomies, such as pristine wilderness or tainted earth...These dichotomies are ones of agricultural regions such as the Midwest becoming 'ecological sacrifice zones.'[124]

Although Sanford is speaking to issues in the United States in this quote, the same conceptual and physical worries transcend geographical boundaries to also apply to those in India. Further, we can inquire whether such ecological sacrifice zones extend beyond non-humans to also

[123] Similar to the work of the Frankfurt School and Theodor Adorno, I suggest that this relationship forms meaning(s) through its critique and illumination of one's epistemological "field of view." Rather than asserting or arguing meaning through positive formulations and their negations (i.e., I can deduce that such-and-such is true and distinct by it not representing x, y, and z), I suggest that such a formulation of suicide and agriculture co-constitutes its meaning among its perceived outcast attributes, the inefficient, the "culturally backwards," etc. Non-linear complexity is the key to unlocking the messy underlying conditions of farmer suicide. Thereis more detail on this formulation in Chapter 3.

[124] Sanford, A. Whitney and Shiva, Vandana. *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. p. 164.

mandate the sacrifice of farmers themselves. To say that this produces unease among farmers would be an understatement.

Anxiety and Direction

In a second text, *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence*, Sanford examines parallels between food anxiety, agriculture, community structures, and more. Specifically,

> Debates over food miles and whether corn should feed cars or people, coupled with rising needs for assistance at food pantries, illustrate social anxieties about food—not only what we will eat, but also how we will produce that food...Perhaps if supply chains were cut for a week or so, our garden might see us through, but I doubt our ability to sustain our food supply over the longer term.[125]

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has afforded us the clarity to know that Sanford's worries became reality for many people. As one example, in April of 2020, farmers in the midwestern and southern United States destroyed large quantities of eggs, onions, beans, and cabbage because of supply chain problems.[126] These farmers have not recovered from this action, and market prices for these goods can become volatile if this practice is repeated too often.

As another example, in December of 2020, farmers across the Midwest, Montana, and Idaho were forced to bury billions of pounds of potatoes for the same reason.[127] Not only were farmers responsible for disposing of their lost crops, but they also had to pay for such disposal,

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[125] Sanford, Whitney. *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017. p. 23.

[126] Yaffe-Bellany, David and Corkery, Michael. "Dumped Milk, Smashed Eggs, Ploughed Vegetables: Food Waste of the Pandemic." *New York Times.* 11 April 2020. Available from: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/business/coronavirus-destroying-food.html.

[127] Narishkin, Abby, et al. "Why potato farmers are stuck with billions of pounds of potatoes." *Business Insider*. 20 December 2020. Available from: https://www.businessinsider.com/potato-farmers-destroy-potatoes-covid19-even-in-a-food-shortage-2020-6.

falling even further into the red. India has experienced the same kind of complications where international export routes closed due to virus safety concerns. With global gridlock, India was forced to sell most of its agricultural products to its neighbors, if they were even willing to buy amidst securing ventilators, fuel, and medical equipment. Unfortunately, there is no current formal, government sponsored investigation into food waste in India as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Needless to say, this dynamic has resulted in widespread fear and anxiety among farmers regarding their day-to-day instability throughout nearly the entire agricultural system. It is at least comprehensible to see the relationship between "natural" disasters or influence and seasonal losses. Hurricanes hit the coastlines, harsh winters can cause snap freezes, and prolonged droughts can put a lot of stress on water-intensive crops. Farmers have successfully navigated such difficulties for a long time. It is incomprehensible to grasp the agricultural system itself as the cause for such suffering. Consumers, policymakers, and farmers are all at an important crossroads to decide how this system is conceptualized moving forward.

As recent as a few years ago, there was a citizen response to extreme consumer culture in the form of slowing agricultural production and consumption down entirely. Perhaps this was an attempt to confront the consequential dread of the system and localize its constituent parts. In systems that prioritize neoliberal conceptions of freedom and liberty, this proposed decrease in agricultural production and consumption rate was met with substantial resistance. Sanford notes that in some instances, the proposed rules in communities pushing for a simpler, slower way of life were even more restrictive than those of homeowners' associations.[128] I have spent the last

[128] Sanford, Whitney. *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017. p. 92.

six years of my life in Texas, and I understand how reluctant many people are to endorse such restrictive measures.

People value their freedom to choose and protect their way of life, and this makes sense. Such freedom is extremely precious. I do not say this as a broad-sweeping comment in favor of the virtue of patriotism but as someone who has traveled to quite a few areas of the world. Some of these areas would be considered "developed" by neoliberal western standards, and some of them would be considered "underdeveloped" or perhaps even "Third-world" by the same set of standards. While freedom is not something with which the United States has a monopoly, the degree to which we can express freedom in the United States is a unique construct. What consumers and policymakers need to realize is that this freedom rides on the shoulders of farmer suffering and sacrifice. We can pay relatively the same consistent amount for agricultural goods despite breakdowns in logistics because farmers are "eating" the cost. Federal and state financial aid is there, to be sure, but it is nowhere near enough to equalize the economic imbalance present.

Apart from the hurdle of having to convince people to "buy-in" to such a decrease in production and consumption, these movements can be dangerous for those involved. Sanford also notes that "Intentional communities and movements that advocate practices and technologies that threaten powerful business interests...face pushback and retaliation from these groups."[129] While slowing things down may indeed provide some relief to farmers, it is neither clear that this strategy is viable in the long-term nor does this strategy necessitate better conditions for farmers. One possible outcome of slowing down the entire system is that some farmers find themselves unemployed and pushed out of the network entirely as demand lessens.

[129] Sanford, Whitney. *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017. p. 236.

Rates of production and consumption are certainly part of the problem, but they are nowhere near the whole story.

So, what exactly accounts for this danger to farmers and reluctance to consumer and infrastructure change, other than the habitual convenience factor? Before the politicization and abstraction of the agricultural system, simply using less may have indeed provided direct relief to farmers. Now, it is clear that reduction can only be part of a much larger picture. It is necessary to also consider a perplexing mix of utilitarian patriotism, the perception of a sterile agricultural system, and the prevailing discourse of cures and diseases.

Farmer Sacrifice, Another Kind of Patriotism

In anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's famous 1996 book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, he explores the links between India, patriotism, colonialism, and globalism. Although it has not been clearly and directly phrased in such a fashion, I think that the sacrifices and intense struggles farmers face in both India and the United States are implied as a kind of patriotic act. This patriotism is a kind of social and cultural contract, although this contract appears of little philosophical value to the proverbial signee (i.e., farmers). When considering *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai says,

> That is, it may be time to rethink monopatriotism, patriotism directed exclusively to the hyphen between nation and state, and to allow the material problems we face—the deficit, the environment, abortion, race, drugs, jobs—to define those social groups and ideas for which we would be willing to live, and die...Patriotism—like history—is unlikely to end, but its objects may be susceptible to transformation, in theory and practice.[130]

While Appadurai is not explicit in exactly *what concept* this hyphenated area between nation and state reinforces (a gesture to the complexities of life, perhaps?), I think the world is witnessing

[130] Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. p. 176.

quite a different realization today as a result of abstracted labour modalities than what Appadurai anticipated back then. The hyphenated area between nation and state is not a gesture towards complex social life, it is *homo faber* wrought in systemic form. What has mediated and joined the spaces of nation and state for so long has been a world of abstraction and fabrication. It is one terrible thing to be wary, as in Aldous Huxley's famous *Brave New World*, of state control over powerful technology. It is another terrible thing entirely for a whole demographic to be subsumed under such *techne* by virtue of their forced participation.

Appadurai hints at the potential for change but to what effect? Appadurai's word choice of "susceptible" is relevant here, and a critique of susceptibility and vulnerability is key to unpacking how many in India and the United States view suicide within agricultural infrastructure. What kinds of things are "susceptible?" Military weaknesses leave soldiers susceptible to harm. Unprotected mahogany is susceptible to wood rot. Leaks in roofs leave homes susceptible to long-term water damage. People with compromised immune systems are susceptible to infection or even death. I could keep going; the list continues. What of society at-large? Is it inaccurate, or even improper, to say that society itself is susceptible to things?

To turn to Appadurai's words again,

> The nation-state conducts throughout its territories the bizarrely contradictory project of creating a flat, contiguous, and homogenous space of nationness and simultaneously a set of places and spaces (prisons, barracks, airports, radio stations, secretariats, parks, marching grounds, processional routes) calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline, and mobilization.[131]

While these words ring true, Appadurai is missing a large piece of the puzzle in this list of forces. The aforementioned homogenization, internal distinctions, and divisions do indeed provide necessary conditions for ceremony, surveillance, discipline, and mobilization in the

[131] Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. p. 189.

context of that nation-state. These things also provide the necessary conditions for sterilization and objectification within the system itself. Taking the internal logic of the current agricultural infrastructure into account, farmer suicide cannot exist as part of its image.

In this way, farmer suicide is a constant reminder that the system is inherently flawed and aims not towards efficiency but towards exploitation. As a result, the agricultural infrastructure is constantly sterilizing such an image so that John and Jane Doe can buy their products from the grocery store on a clear conscience and peace of mind. We can work not towards such a conceptually insulatory practice but towards a conceptually vulnerable practice in which the workings of the agricultural system are clear and present to the public. This includes farmer suicide.

Now that the environmental conditionality of suicide among farmers in the United States and India has been sketched out, it is time to turn to the discourse of diseases and cures. This discourse of diseases and cures, as it relates to the agricultural system, enables a form of necropolitics that can be shifted to provide hope for farmers. Neoliberal global enterprise clearly moves in the direction of sterilization, or at least a projected form of sterilization. The reality is that the world is messy, unkept, and always changing.

CHAPTER 4

NECROPOLITICS AND A CURE FOR FARMER SUICIDE

> *In any case no cure is a return to biological innocence. To be cured is to be given new norms of life, sometimes superior to the old ones. There is an irreversibility of biological normativity*.
>
> George Canguilhem

This chapter begins with Georges Canguilhem's discussion of cures because his notion that cures entail new philosophical norms and that these norms are tied to the body also applies to perceptions of suicide today. Cures and diseases have quite the entangled binary history when it comes to unraveling the boundaries, contexts, and classifications attached to each. Ask anyone with an educational background in Parmenidean problems, and they will tell you that virtually all connotative opposites or dichotomies are not quite what they seem. While many may say that the opposite of black is white, hot is cold, narrow is wide, etc., it is more logically and philosophically accurate to say that the opposite of black is non-black, hot is non-hot, narrow is non-narrow, etc. Following this logic, the opposite of cure is non-cure. The opposite of disease is non-disease. In one's everyday language, this may sound absurd. However, it is yet still the case if one wishes to keep logic and politics in comprehensible order.

Canguilhem positioned power relationships in biology and human sciences as transcendent to their physical aspects to also include others.[132] Canguilhem and his student, Michel Foucault, treated power in much the same way that Immanuel Kant treated freedom. In this respect, I think Canguilhem and Foucault are correct. Namely, power and freedom must be logically presupposed despite one's inability to demonstrate them in the same empirical fashion that one might demonstrate the distance between two points or the temperature of a glass of

[132] This approach also, in turn, influenced much of Michel Foucault's work on philosophical archeology, biology, and logics of power. Foucault admits as much in his introduction to *The Normal and the Pathological*.

water. That is, both power and freedom clearly have functions and relationships with mechanized oppression and knowledge. It is one's inability to firmly localize power in a complex globalizing world that maintains its inherent imbalance.[133]

It is Canguilhem's conceptual broadening and re-cognition that are critically important to this chapter. One may wonder where this rigid health and disease dichotomy originated. Well, the best etymological estimations available place the genesis of the dichotomy at the cusp of the modern philosophical period, around the 16th century. Academics and researchers during that time began to re-envision the relationship between humans and nature, and this necessitated a re-envisioning between cures, health, and diseases. Eventually, the age of humors and bile receded to give way to Europe's Age of Enlightenment and the anatomical and physiological works of August Comte's positivism and Claude Bernard's objectivism.[134]

As a direct consequence of the modern philosophical lineage, which both we and Canguilhem inherited, the majority of life scientists moved away from "the physician" of ancient times that studied both matters of the soul and body to focus instead on material causes and effects.[135] This focus was an attempt to systematically order the chaos of the natural world, to reign it in, explain it, and own it.[136] There were a number of good reasons to adopt this mindset a long time ago if one found oneself living in a burgeoning metropolis. Nature was extremely

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[133] Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977.* Edited by Colin Gordon. Translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper. New York: Random House, Inc., [1972] 1980. pp 89-93.

[134] Canguilhem, George. *The Normal and the Pathological*. With an Introduction by Michel Foucault. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1989. pp. 41-3.

[135] I speak here of the kind of physician (paieon) highlighted in Plato's *Symposium*, Aristotle's work in biology, etc. found in Ancient Greece. While it is not necessary to make the same kinds of appeals to the gods that these old physicians did, the point is that they appealed to more than just a person's anatomy (anatomikós) and mechanisms (michanismoí) in their attempts to find healing (paieonios).

[136] Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, [1980] 1990, pp. 216-235.

violent juxtaposed with humans' abilities to repair, it threatened the safety and expansion of cities, and in many cases, it was indeed unpredictable. While the vast majority of the so-called "developed" world does not live in this state anymore, this could radically change with the pace of global climate change.

As discussed in Chapter 3, India still faces many of these historical concerns, which are exacerbated by this same mindset of modern determinism and domination. The United States is certainly not immune in this regard. Canguilhem's approach to the philosophy of science attempted to lessen the influence of this domineering and deterministic attitude of the modern physician in favor of a more dynamic model.

Now, I would like to remind the reader of the original thesis of this dissertation, "Every empirical manifestation of suicide maintains an axiological concept of suicide." Here, I have done some logical work to adapt Canguilhem's phrasing contained in *The Normal and the Pathological*, "Every empirical concept of disease preserves a relation to the axiological concept of disease."[137] I have made this logical adaptation for the following reasons:

1.) "Empirical concepts" are embodied in the world. As such, "manifestation" seems a more appropriate choice for such a realized, embodied concept. Otherwise, one is confronted with a rather odd "objective" or third person account of personal experience and cognition. We cannot kill off our own subjective lens in such a way. Subject-object relations as such are simply a more reductionist and convenient form of subject-subject perceptual relations and assumptions.[138] Both "subjects" are active forces in the phenomenon of perception. To suggest

[137] Canguilhem, George. *The Normal and the Pathological*. With an Introduction by Michel Foucault. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1989. p. 229.

[138] Such was one of the key insights in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. The full account of subject-subject relations and perception is in Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. New York: Routledge, [1945] 2012, pp. 214-252.

that one is active (as a subject) while the other is entirely passive (as an object) is to erase the mutual meaning-making space between two actors or things. This is not to suggest that this meaning-making is necessarily in equilibrium or equally distributed, only that it is not a one-way street, so to speak.

2.) One step further than Canguilhem, I argue that such empirical manifestations do not *preserve* mere *relations* to the axiological concepts of disease but rather *are themselves* the relations to the valuation and power discourse of disease. In this way, *knowing* suicide and disease (Greek *gnōsis* as "awareness" as well as "knowledge") and *being in* dis-ease are one and the same.

3.) This problem of farmer suicide is in part a rhetorical problem amidst many praxis concerns. I do not mean to say here that it is a rhetorical problem in the sense of possessing few substantial consequences. Rather, it is rhetorical in the sense that there are a great many aspects of farmer suicide that people take as "given," logically speaking. Particularly, the dominant view of policymakers with regard to farming in the United States and India seems to be that poverty is the greatest contributing factor to suicide. This reductionism reinforces an anthropomorphizing of the livelihood of "the market" as a substitute for the livelihood of actual farmers.[139] Thus, an act of "speaking for " the lived realities of farmers emerges and minimizes the infrastructural and systemic damage caused by the current prevailing mega-scale farming models. While providing economic subsidies and aid can certainly help farmers cover their expenses, short-term loans, etc., the narrow economy cannot fully "account" for the complex lived reality of farmer struggle in today's neoliberal landscape.

[139] Consult the following for more on the links between market reports and personification. Knight, Peter. "Reading the Market: Abstraction, Personification and the Financial Column of *Town Topics* Magazine." *Journal of American Studies* 46, no. 4 (2012): 1055–75. Knight explores literature from market historians to highlight moments where the "market" became increasingly abstracted and eventually more personalized.

At this intersection, the reader probably remembers the calls made for "inter-personalizing" one's problems earlier in this work, in the Arendtian sense. There is a key difference between that kind of personalization of the political and the anthropomorphizing of markets, as the agricultural industry is currently undergoing. While both instances certainly offer a kind of transactional relationship between forces, Arendt's inter-personalization includes a keen critical awareness and resistance to thoughtless action. If people simply go through the motions of everyday life without thoughtful questioning, this can leave one blind to problems, shortcomings, and oppression in various systemic forms. Anthropomorphizing of markets is exactly the connotative opposite of Arendt's view. That is, the anthropomorphizing of markets creates a nominal and psychological slippage when discriminating between market contributors and the market "itself." Over time, the "market" appears as if it were flesh and blood just as farmers are, in this case. Rather than providing clarity, this phenomenon clouds the perception of such a system.

It is good logical practice not to fall into a kind of pathetic fallacy at play here. I do not mean to say this in its traditional sense, which also carries with it age-old value assumptions about how inferior non-human animals are, the "passivity" of nature, etc. Rather, I simply mean to gesture towards caution in cases where infrastructural system machinations substitute for real, living people. There is a wealth of philosophical literature in post-humanist and trans-humanist areas that addresses issues of the artificial vs. natural dichotomy. While it is outside the scope of this dissertation to address or analyze these, they may prove helpful in the future regarding agricultural infrastructure.

It is important to note that markets do not fall ill. People fall ill. Markets do not take their own lives. People take their own lives. Markets do not suffer. People suffer. When "buying-in"

to small talk and everyday colloquialisms, it can be easy to slip into this kind of language. After all, the health of each individual is connected to the health of the system. But this connection is indirect and mediated through fabrication and action. The whole is not necessarily representative of its constituent parts. We can take care to notice such categorically different entities. Speaking of a prior essay that informed the writing of *The Normal and the Pathological*, Canguilhem summarizes this problem of dichotomy by stating the following:

> In our *Essay* we compared the ontological conception of disease, in which disease is portrayed as the qualitative opposite of health, with the positivist conception, which derives it quantitatively from the normal state. When disease is considered as an evil, therapy is given for a revalorization; when disease is considered as deficiency or excess, therapy consists in compensation.[140]

So, these two different conceptualizations of disease also have different means of offering remedies.

Right away, the predominant framing is one of economy and medicine that balance the scales. This revalorization process is precisely the kind of patriotic sacrifice demanded of farmers in the United States and India. If they are to suffer greatly, then they had better produce greatly as well. The reader recalls this dissertation's first chapter beginning with an epithet from Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Sisyphus' connection to farmers holds a great deal more relevance than this epithet initially revealed. Just as Sisyphus chained Death to save the lives of other humans, farmer suicide keeps death occupied so that the rest of the population may resume its tasks as normal.

Canguilhem's discussion of illness and health is similar to the narrow and broad notions of economy. On the one hand, there is the narrow sense of health as a process of elimination and final solutions to problems. On the other hand, there is a broad sense of health as a dynamic

[140] Canguilhem, George. *The Normal and the Pathological*. With an Introduction by Michel Foucault. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1989. p. 275.

series of problematics in which views of health are subject to regular change. The same is true for illness.

Further still, Canguilhem states,

> Let us apply what is said above of the doctor to his client. We shall say that the healthy man does not become sick insofar as he is healthy. No healthy man becomes sick, for he is sick only insofar as his health abandons him and in this he is not healthy. The so-called healthy man thus *is not* healthy. His health is an equilibrium which he redeems on inceptive ruptures. The menace of disease is one of the components of health.[141]

The mutual vulnerability and flux between these two terms, health and disease, highlights the contemporary policy impasse at this issue. Namely, it is impossible within this vocabulary for policymakers to discern who the "healthy" farmers are, as the perceived livelihood of the agricultural, infrastructural system is actively erasing the agency of such actors. Instead, policymakers are left to reactionary roles, dealing with the "dis-eased" (i.e., the obvious, outspokenly discontent) farmers who are struggling immensely and often on the brink of suicide. So, one is left with two choices here: we can maintain the status quo and same vocabulary, infrastructure, and discourse while acknowledging that these are flawed in the face of this problem (which, ironically, is quite anti-utilitarian!); or, we can adapt vocabulary, infrastructure, and discourse in a way that reflects the kind of dynamic relationship shown here by Canguilhem.[142] To better understand the whole picture here, there needs to be some discussion of economic frameworks and assumptions. The economic landscape of the agricultural

[141] Canguilhem, George. *The Normal and the Pathological*. With an Introduction by Michel Foucault. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1989. p. 287.

[142] I would like to take the time to head-off any accusations of committing a false-choice fallacy here. It is clear to the reader that there are indeed only two theoretical options to choose from, which may however lead to many other praxis options down the road. The second option (i.e., Canguilhem's framing) formally disrupts the sedimented discourse at hand and allows for both policy effectiveness and pluralism by deconstructing the perceived fixed opposition of "cure" and "disease" or "health" and "disease." One of the obvious fears of western policy discourse is that the inclusion of dynamic definitions and/or pluralism render such efforts unable to find meaningful, efficient direction. This is an unnecessary hangover from Occam's Razor. The most effective and efficient form of policy is not always simple and in a straight line. Philosophers and psychologists have successfully dealt in inexact, nonlinear terms for the better part of 2000+ years. It is time to include such efforts in public policy for farming infrastructure.

infrastructure has many moving pieces to its inner workings. Due to the abstraction of labour and commodities markets, there is a great deal to unpack in this regard. For this, let us now turn to the philosophical and economic analysis that regulation theory can offer.

Regulation Theory and Abstraction

If we are to study this kind of mistaken personification or anthropomorphizing, we may wish to offer critique via regulation theory. Specifically, Michel Aglietta and French regulation theory better deal with the categorization and difficulty of today's capitalism on a neoliberal global scale. By neoliberal, I mean an economic and political environment that emphasizes free markets and deregulation above most other things. This is not to say that deregulation and free market is "Laissez-faire" but that such an environment encourages global reform that lessens regulation in favor of free market enterprise.

Aglietta and his colleagues offer more apt vocabulary and analysis for navigating a global landscape in which conventional national boundaries and limitations oscillate in and out of one's field of view. Despite Arendt's relevance to this dissertation, this area is where her work falls short. Put simply, the current neoliberal landscape is something that would have been outside of the scope of her work for her time period. Neoliberalism moves towards a world of like strategies, like terms, and like concepts. If there is more commonality at hand, then less regulation needs to occur, theoretically speaking. Now whether this commonality and homogenization is *real* or *practical* are two different questions. Nonetheless, these are the aims of neoliberalism within the context of a globalizing world.

The world is in flux, and so too is the structure of capital. Admittedly, Aglietta's work is extremely dense and difficult to move through, despite its helpful application, so I do my best to summarize the main points and relevant arguments as they pertain to farmer suicide. The

conceptual machinery at play has many layers, and philosophy is only equipped to analyze some of these layers. To understand this issue in full view, it requires a multi-disciplinary approach and collaboration.

To begin with, Aglietta provides two major distinctions in what he terms "regimes of accumulation." These regimes and their accumulation are a reference to Marxist critiques of capitalism that have focused on capitalistic tendencies to overproduce and to overvalue. While I am not placing my theoretical framework firmly in the Marxist side of things, it is undoubtedly informed by Marxist conceptions of the alienation of labor. As more and more layers are added to the production process, those who fabricate the things of the world become more and more detached from the overall process. At one point in time, a single person conceptualized an automobile or tractor in its entirety. Now, one person is only able to conceptualize a small portion or a singular component of a construction like this. Cell phones, vaccines, gas pumps, computers, food processors, etc. all follow this same trend of knowledge tunnel vision.

I do have one major concern with Marxist critiques, as well as some minor ones. If one is faithful to Marx's own words, many Marxist critiques of capital assume a level of determinism that does little to help those who operate outside of western political conceptions of "progressive" or "developed" agricultural practice. To put it plainly, Marx clearly thought that those civilizations outside of the west that had not yet reached a crisis of capital were simply further behind in the grand scheme of things.[143] Not only is this false as a generalization, but

[143] Specifically, consult Karl Marx's *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1*, in which he states in the Preface to the First German Edition, "Intrinsically, it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that result from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results. The country that is more developed industrially only shows to the less developed, the image of its own future." So, it is clear that "the crisis" is inevitable given enough time. Unfortunately, there are many other complex social elements to this that get swept along in this determinism.

there are also many instances of so-called "traditional" agricultural practices that are viable and productive, some of which were discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this work. The category "traditional" can be used as a means of empowerment, but it can also be used pejoratively to connote a culture that is behind the times, so to speak. The rights and knowledge of indigenous people are being revisited by scholars around the world in an attempt to disentangle them from such blanket marginalization. "Digging up" older, viable ways of conducting agriculture is a process that we can encourage in the service of working together in an equitable way. Through this, one may re-discover cultural practices that have been erased by historically monolithic views.

Aglietta's first distinction is the "predominantly extensive regime of accumulation" and reads as follows,

> *The predominantly extensive regime of accumulation* is that in which relative surplus-value is obtained by transforming the organization of labour; the traditional way of life may persist or be destroyed, but it is not radically recomposed by the logic of utilitarian functionalism. Only agriculture is affected by the formation of the agricultural-foodstuffs complex. The division of society affected by classificatory and identificatory logic operates on working time in production in the strict sense. Its material support is mechanization. The general movement of accumulation that follows from it is the build-up of industry in successive layers. The combined development of the two departments of production is achieved only with difficulty, the pace of accumulation encountering recurrent obstacles.[144]

It may seem curious that Aglietta suggests only agriculture is affected in this type of accumulation. The reasoning for this argument is quite straightforward: all forms of precapitalist production have agriculture as their productive base.[145] Aglietta then informally argues that, at least in the United States, this agricultural-foodstuffs complex acts as a sort of ground-zero for

[144] Aglietta, Michel. *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*. New York: New Left Books, [1979] 2000, pp. 71-2.

[145] Ibid., p. 73.

mass industrial scaling in other sectors as well. So, since this is the historical foundation of such accumulation processes (and by consequence, also alienation processes), the failings of agricultural infrastructure become even more fertile ground for analysis. Infrastructural problems resulting from regimes of accumulation are connected with one another.

Now, Aglietta presents a second type of regime of accumulation. It is worthy of note that these regimes both exist at the same time in the economic space. One simply appears more dominant than the other at different moments in time. This produces a kind of kaleidoscopic effect between the two regimes. Aglietta's second distinction is the "predominantly intensive regime of accumulation" and reads as follows,

> *The predominantly intensive regime of accumulation* creates a new mode of life for the wage-earning class by establishing a logic that operates on the totality of time and space occupied or traversed by its individuals in daily life. A social consumption norm is formed, which no longer depends in any way on communal life, but entirely on an abstract code of utilitarianism. This norm is stratified according to principles that closely correspond to the stratification of social groups within the wage-earning class. The intensive regime of accumulation accomplishes an integration of the two departments of production that makes possible a far more regular pace of accumulation and far more rapid increase in the rate of surplus-value.[146]

Generally speaking, as far as Marxist critiques go, "surplus-value" is the productive value left-over after paying workers, maintaining supply chains, etc. It is capitalism's methodology to then turn this surplus-value into profit, cascading into the many complex capitalistic mechanisms that one sees today around the world. There is a glaring problem with the "predominantly intensive regime of accumulation." Here, the economic system itself is assigned a more active soul or living character than those who contribute to it.[147] The "abstracted code of utilitarianism" is

[146] Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[147] I speak of the soul in the broad ancient Greek sense of psyche. In this conceptualization, the soul was the thing that moved the body and mind to action. While the body and the mind may not be the same thing, categorically speaking, they were viewed as closely related.

precisely this conceptual turn: instead of the general "greatest amount of good for the greatest number," *a la* Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill's classical approach to utilitarianism, the phrasing becomes the "greatest good for the system." While this may have been informally implied by early utilitarian thinkers, it is much more explicitly apparent today.

In economics, the preconditions that lead to the phenomenon just described are also known as the abstraction of labour (within the context of commodities). Aglietta explains in detail,

> The process of homogenization of economic objects is a social relation. It is the general characteristic of commodity-producing societies, and denotes a mode of division of labour that transforms the products of labour into *commodities*. These products of labour are commodities when they are the products of private labour intended for society in general, whose underlying social character is acknowledged only in an operation of exchange. The exchange transaction realizes the uniformity of products as commodities by establishing an *equivalence* in which private labour appears simply as a fraction of the overall labour of society. This uniform character of labour, as a fraction of overall social labour, is what is known as *abstract labour*. The products of labour are commensurable only from this standpoint...It is quite correct, therefore, to say that commodities have a value….[148]

Here, Aglietta speaks of the historical move away from a kind of direct mixed economy into a more speculative mixed economy. This movement coincides with the discussion of market credit from earlier in this work. In basic terms, the "developed" parts of the world fabricated too many things relative to how markets conventionally determined their value. The United States made too many weapons and manufactured too much crude oil. France had made too many aircraft. Britain had made too many cars. The list continues for many other western leading nations. They had to come up with some kind of a solution that kept product and value (or perhaps more accurately, *perceived* value) in motion despite critical accumulation levels.

So, abstract labour, commodities, and economic social relations emerged as a response to

[148] Aglietta, Michel. *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*. New York: New Left Books, [1979] 2000, pp. 38-9.

slowed capitalist system growth around the world. These conditions allowed for the agricultural industry (as well as other connected industries) to continue producing and resulted in an overvaluation of "real" production capacity. This model is not sustainable today, and we are starting to see this system break down, in real time, amidst global climate change concerns and precarious pandemic conditions.

Given Aglietta's discussion of commodities, exchange value, abstract labour, and money, I understand why many policy fixes for farmer suicide have taken the form of monetary compensation. If money and exchange are perceived as the best way we can collect and account for the abstraction of labour power (i.e., as a commodity and not as an industrial mechanism, strictly speaking), then this monetary intervention would logically make sense as an abstract form of correction. However, for this to be true and formidable, farmer suicide and suffering would also need to have a valued exchange rate relative to abstracted labour power. Since these are not valued and are not part of this scheme, this common economic approach for fixing farmer suicide fails its own test of value and social worth. Rather than address the problem directly, it speaks past it.

Instead of properly accounting for farmer suicide and hardship, what ensues from such abstracted labour is a positive feedback loop of suffering and hardship. The transitions of the loop look like this:

1.) Large market needs are identified.

2.) Scaling efforts begin, ushering in the extensive regime of accumulation.

3.) Farmers face alienation from their labour and labour power.

4.) Disenfranchisement of autonomy and loss of control in such a system begins.

5.) Farmers are forced to rely on mega-scale farming practices, lines of credit, and subsidy structures to hedge against losses as they relate to a pseudo-centralized

agricultural infrastructural system (which also tend to erase "traditional" methods of farming in favor of faster, more "efficient" linear models).

6.) These subsidies, credit, and mega-scale practices anticipate further and further growth, further bottlenecking the farmer's options as increased linear efficiency equates to a healthy economic system.

7.) Farmer well-being is *en bloc* expunged from this system, and linear productivity rate substitutes for it. If the market is doing well, then farmers are doing well (so the story mistakenly goes)

8.) Natural disasters, crop disease, underproduction, pandemics, etc. add to the insecurity and stress of farmers.

9.) Some take their lives due to the need for insurance money, out of shame, extreme poverty, lack of systemic support, or fear.

10.) Policymakers react and insist that too little money or mishandled finances are the cause for suicide when the system of abstract labour power does not value the crisis characteristics expressed by farmers in such a dire circumstance.

11.) Narrow financial relief efforts, on their own, restart the loop and compound on previous suffering, adding "interest," if you will.

With this feedback loop taken into consideration, we again turn to Aglietta,

> The neo-classical theory inspired by liberalism, which amounts to a representation of the system as a pure economy in a natural state of equilibrium, stretches the postulate of homogeneity to its very limits. Not only does the axiom of rationality assign the same identity to all individuals in pursuit of their goals by defining an economic behaviour pattern that can be applied to any domain of social practice, but the characterization of the whole system as an equilibrium created by perfect competition implies that each player is totally aware of the web of their relations with all other players, and that this web presents itself to the individual in the form of constraints on the use of their resources.[149]

I further argue that it is this *telos* of homogeneity, contained within the mixed economic model for abstracted labour, that is responsible for such a poor policy response to farmer suicide issues. A new combination of terms can be introduced to this system, one part philosophical and one part psychological, in order to properly round things out and account for missed variables. This

[149] Aglietta, Michel. *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*. New York: New Left Books, [1979] 2000, p. 389.

problem of farmer suicide does not require such homogeneity. Reductionism and simplicity make things worse, in this case, as they reduce farmer suicide to statistical data rather than data alongside personal experience. Farmer suicide requires a multi-faceted approach that also includes the voices of farmers so that they may have agency over their own production and potential hardships.

Wear Your Mask, Sterilize, and Maintain Six Feet of Distance

With an overview of Aglietta's analysis of regimes of accumulation and abstract labour taken into consideration, let us now return again to Canguilhem. When quoting Henry Sigerist, a prominent Swiss medical historian, Canguilhem points out,

> .... 'disease isolates', and that even if 'this isolation does not alienate men but on the contrary brings them closer to the sick man,' no perceptive patient can ignore the renunciations and limitations imposed by healthy men in order to come near him.[150]

This premonitory attitude of quarantine and sterilization (antecedent to sacrifices and compassion) has been truly tested in our present time. Even more so than the history and experience Canguilhem drew upon, the COVID-19 global pandemic challenges how people treat one another with compassion and empathy. Those with power have always had a voice; history is obvious in this fact. Now, the *healthy and powerful* have immeasurable influence. Keeping with the tone of this work, I would encourage the reader to explore what exactly healthy means in this setting.

At the advent of the pandemic, or rather the reality that this pandemic would be *here among my loved ones*, one could nearly feel it in the air. I would not describe the people around me in Texas as in a state of panic. Panic is what one always sees in Hollywood portrayals of

[150] Canguilhem, George. *The Normal and the Pathological*. With an Introduction by Michel Foucault. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1989. p. 118.

mass disasters. It was extreme apprehension and existential dread. One could *breathe* this thick feeling as though one were in the valleys of Georgia or Houston during the month of July. Anxiety was not a mental state, it was *tangible*. Apart from the physical medical designation that the virus could be airborne, the social atmosphere around such a force was also present in the environment.

For the first six months to a year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sigerist and Canguilhem's words came to life in the United States and other parts of the globe. It was as if an invisible assassin lay ever-lurking in the shadows, non-discriminately reaping loved ones as it saw fit. It could not be appeased and did not care for status, caste, holiness, wealth, virtuous character, or sound arguments. Every life taken was "too soon," the context was unfair, and the world wept while also working tirelessly to save who remained amidst so many unknowns. Even those who survive infection sustain lasting consequences that force a re-evaluation of one's thanatology. Through the fear of such sudden change lies the opportunity to grow in one's understanding and care. We can dare to transgress the atmosphere of isolation of such disease-states. This daring action mandates an existential reorientation.

Out of such uncertainty came many disinformation campaigns, some domestic and some external. For those without much critical logical training, it became quite difficult to tell which information was correct and which was divisive for reasons of personal gain. Do I wash my hands for 30 seconds or three minutes? Why is my neighbor not even bothering to wear a mask? How greatly I had taken my freedom to travel for granted! Not to mention, much of the crisis was happening in real time. On Monday, one may have seen a headline recommending such-and-such a treatment for containing the virus. By Wednesday, this same knowledge was often obsolete or outright incorrect given new information and reactions.

Then came the problem with food supply. For many, I think this may have been the final "wakeup" call that this pandemic was here to stay and that conditions had changed, permanently. The shelves were empty where I live. Those with more money and resources than others had hoarded whatever excess had been present previously. Scalpers were selling cleaning supplies and high demand food for 2000% or more of its original price before the state eventually caught them. As chaos set in and the national supply chains halted, farmers were forced to reroute their product chains and, in some cases, stories reached my ears of dairy farmers having to mass-dump their product, wasting more money and hard work than is comprehensible to most citizens. These stories changed from rumors among friends to national headlines. This is but one sub-market of the agricultural industry affected by the pandemic. The way that it currently functions, our agricultural system is extremely vulnerable to such crisis conditions. It is crucial that one recognizes the vulnerability of farmers as well under the same crisis conditions.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's document "Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19 Response" offers an exhaustive definition of essential agricultural workers, safe practices, risk assessment criteria, and connection to adjacent industries. In a document that is laden with sick leave policy, safe distancing, reporting features, OSHA compliance, and more, I was left with a pressing question. "Why is mental health completely left out of this?" There is not a single bulleted item in this document devoted to addressing increased existential suffering at the hands of such infrastructural difficulty and failure.

The reader may be wondering, is this also the case at the state level? Well, I took the liberty of researching the COVID-19 resources and statements from the Department of Agriculture in all 50 U.S. States via their publicly available websites. Nearly all of these

departments offered some form of economic relief to compensate for losing seasonal workers, other labour interests, workforce proximity caps, etc. Not a single one of these departments offered any facilitation or connection to non-economic relief or mental health for farmers. I do not know what can speak more loudly than such an absence and silence.

Now, the daily mantra is "The world will never be the same." However, such a tautology is necessarily the case and always has been. The narrative of stability is a convenient one that many tell in order to make sense of such a chaotic world. The truth is that the world is in a constant state of "never being the same" in which one has the choice to adapt and shift one's vocabulary and power discourse. The threat is not instability of the world but rather the fixedness of one's perception and habits in the face of such inevitable instability. Privilege does a remarkably effective job of making it seem like the world is not changing around oneself. A steady job can create the perception that jobs are not difficult to acquire for others. A comfortable salary can create the perception that both the narrow and broad economies are improving for most people. This is not necessarily the case. A life free of major health concerns can create the perception that good health is simply a matter of choice. This pandemic was an abrasive reminder of various forms of privilege for many people, particularly in the United States.

COVID-19 is not simply a virus that can be easily compartmentalized and eradicated. This pandemic has covered our living spaces, seeped through the cracks, and lives on in our minds. It has become a sociological and philosophical poison and fear. Can I safely hug my family? Will our infrastructural systems hold? How do we reconcile the reality that we cannot adequately consent to such levels of suffering and pain? Am I unknowingly a danger to those around me? How in the world do I remain compelling and compassionate as an educator to my

students in such a time? Now that mask mandates are relaxing, do I want to wear one anyway? All of these questions shake loose some of the foundations and comforts of one's daily life.

The freedom and ability to choose such a change in vocabulary and power discourse becomes complex and entangled in cases of limited autonomy and restricted sovereignty. Farmers are experiencing both limited autonomy and restricted sovereignty today. To this effect, we can learn a great deal about the limits of sovereignty and the displacement of infrastructural power from the work of philosopher Achille Mbembe in *Necropolitics*. Mbembe speaks of politics in the following way,

> The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power.[151]

I do not think it is anything profound to state that people need to be critically aware of the potential of those in power to take and give life and freedom. This has always been so. However, I do think it is profound to position sovereignty, as *Necropolitics* does, as a lived political process rather than a political ideal. This is a different view than the traditional social contract theory representation of sovereignty coming out of political philosophy. It is common philosophical knowledge that for Thomas Hobbes, sovereignty was part of an unspoken social agreement with monarchs to maintain order and security. Ideally, it is reciprocal. Historically, it was not so. For John Locke, sovereignty was inverted from Hobbes to emphasize the power of the people over the divine right of kings and monarchs. In practice, such a view of sovereignty was not equal or equitable among people of different ethnic backgrounds, gender, etc. despite its unifying aims.

[151] Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. p. 66.

Sovereignty, in Mbembe's sense, operates as the practical consequence of Hannah Arendt's push and pull present in *homo faber's* and *animal laborans*' struggle. When one *only* fabricates for others in the service of their transcendence via fabrication and *also* cannot meet the conditions for sovereignty in the context of the active life, death and suicide knock at the door. If the concepts of abstracted labour and regimes of accumulation have such a great hold on the living processes of agriculture and farming, this relationship necessitates the consideration of the connection with death in this same infrastructure.

Mbembe has more to say of sovereignty in this regard,

> After this presentation of politics as the work of death, I now turn to sovereignty, defined as the right to kill...Thus the question becomes: What is the relationship between politics and death in those systems that operate only through a state of emergency?[152]

Presumably, Mbembe asks this question with the knowledge that the predominant ethical paradigm today is utilitarian at its core. Such a utilitarian framework demands prioritization (i.e., triage) of life within the system when hard times arrive. Mbembe's ending question in the quote above is one that we can consider when studying farmer suicide. Both the United States and India have been in a state of farming infrastructure emergency for quite some time. "The market" and its regimes of accumulation have reached their tipping points. The balancing act between supply, demand, and sustainability has been in a state of crisis since at least the 1970s, of which the prior discussion of market credit and debt is a major contributor. The state of affairs is so dire for farmers that the taking of one's own life has become an ultimate attempt to establish sovereignty where there is little to none present. In this case, suicide offers the ultimate signification for those in the pit of despair.[153]

[152] Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. p. 70.

[153] Ibid., p. 90.

In the end, this theoretical and practical shift towards suicide as a complex sociopolitical phenomenon cannot allow for us to merely live as passersby. Intentionality and awareness are potent critical tools in the face of the passerby's slippage. The passerby, living a life of thoughtlessness, is our greatest enemy when the livelihoods of real individuals have fallen prey to the livelihood of the abstract system. It is easy to purchase and consume one's food without having to pay any mind to where it comes from, who produces it, how they live or are treated, etc. Now is not a time for what is easy.

In fact, *passant* is packed with layers upon layers of meaning. Mbembe instills the reader with much food for thought,

> But, for starters, this word *passant* contains several others within in, beginning with *pas* ("not" as well as "step")—at once a negative instance (that which is not or does not yet exist or exists only through its absence), and a rhythm, cadence, and even speed, along a course or a march, or through a displacement— that which is (in) movement. Following this, as if from behind, is *passé* —not the past as a trace of what has already taken place, but the past in the process of happening, such as one can grasp it there…
>
> Next, there is *passant* as "passerby," that figure of the "elsewhere," since the passerby is only passing by, because, precisely, arriving from another place, he is moving toward other skies. He is "passing" through— and therefore enjoins us to welcome him, at least momentarily.
>
> But there is also *passeur* (smuggler) and, further still, *passage* (way/ gangway) and *passager* (passenger). The passerby is, then, all at once the vehicle, the bridge or gangway, the planking that covers the row of beams in a ship, the one who, having roots elsewhere, is passing through somewhere he stays temporarily (even if it means) returning home when the time comes. What would happen, however, if he did not return and if, by any chance, he continued his journey, going from one place to another…
> In evoking, apropos of the question of our times, the passerby, that is to say, the fugitive character of life, no praise is being made either of exile or of refuge, flight, or nomadism.[154]

Many people do live their lives as the "passerby" in these ways. Many live lives of willful ignorance, oblivious to all of the logistical steps involved in getting their food from the farm to

[154] Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. pp. 186-7.

their kitchen table, let alone the hardships that farmers often face in this process. The work-life of someone both in the United States and India is not often kind to those who take the time to live critically. Powerful and thoughtful awareness takes a great deal more time than most are willing to give or that capitalistic systemic pressure allows. It is easy to isolate oneself from such awareness and critique out of comfort and fear of the unknown. Sovereignty is not a commodity that can be gifted, paid, traded, or allowed. It is something that must be lived, by virtue, in accordance with autonomy and *eudaimonia*.

Policy Issues and Dis-ease Control

In the United States, suicide statistics and study fall under the purview of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Within this, the CDC lists a number of different lengthy, "preventative" steps for suicide:

> ....strengthen economic supports, strengthen household financial security, housing stabilization policies, strengthen access and delivery of suicide care, coverage of mental health conditions in health insurance policies, reduce provider shortages in underserved areas, safer suicide care through system change, create protective environments, reduce access to lethal means among persons at high risk of suicide, organizational policies and culture, community-based policies to reduce excessive alcohol use, promote connectedness, peer norm programs, community engagement activities, teach coping and problem-solving skills, social-emotional learning programs, parenting skill and family relationship programs, identify and support people at risk, gatekeeper training, crisis intervention, treatment for people at risk of suicide, treatment to prevent re-attempts, lessen harms and prevent future risk, postvention, and safe reporting and messaging about suicide.[155]

In the same online database, the CDC generally acknowledges the need to expand action and policy in this regard but does not commit to any concrete strategies other than the will to change and facilitate states that want to change. Despite a 62-page expanded document of the categories listed above, none of these expanded discussions acknowledge the existence of flawed

[155] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Suicide Prevention: Fast Facts." January 21, 2021. Available from: https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html.

infrastructural systems or infrastructural oppression. Furthermore, all of the expanded discussions contain the logical assumption that suicide can be treated in a linear fashion, as one would with polio or cholera. I reiterate again; suicide is not a disease in this linear sense. It is a complex sociopolitical phenomenon in which disease and cure are bound with one another, perennially so. As Canguilhem stated previously in this chapter, such complexity highlights the fact that the menace of disease is a component of health.

This interaction between disease and health may remind the reader of the concept of pharmakon in ancient Greece. A pharmakon was regarded as both remedy and poison depending on the framing or circumstance. A straightforward example of such a concept can be found in almost every household medicine cabinet today: ibuprofen. If one takes the right amount, the drug can subdue migraine symptoms, headaches, joint pain, etc. If one takes too little or too much, then effects can range from no pain relief to death. Thus, pharmacy and pharmacology are studies of this relationship. In order to logically frame which interactions are the "healthy" ones, there is a context of side effects and unhealthy interactions as well. There is no framing of health in an environment of sterilization.

Discourses of power can present with the same structure as a pharmakon but are sociologically situated. This is not to say that such a relationship is inherently present in language itself but that complex sociopolitical phenomena, like farmer suicide, are affected by how an existential state is viewed and communicated.[156] Furthermore, this is not to say that such a relationship is deterministic in its material connections, but it is undoubtedly influenced by its material connections. How people conceptualize, value, and communicate farmer suicide

[156] Here, I do not follow the same path as Jacques Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy." Derrida's framework is too heavily dependent on the activity of language itself.

problems affects what kind of aid and resources are available to those in need. The United States and India need improvement in this area.

On October 10, 2014, India implemented a policy that made mental health care available nationally. In 2017, India expanded this effort to include more health coverage. However, there is even less publicly available data on suicide policy strategies in India than in the United States. Apart from a vague and general pledge to the World Health Organization aiming to provide "multisectoral collaboration and comprehensive suicide prevention strategy," the Indian government appears to be quiet on this subject.[157] This does not even take into account the specificity of farmer suicide crises per cash crop growth, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this work.

None of these "preventative" categories are equipped to address the infrastructural problems of farmer suicide. They are simply too rigid and insulated against adaptation. In order to have a successful prevention effort, this depends entirely on a static and predictable subject. I can prevent myself from running into a fence because I can see it, and it is stationary. I can prevent myself from going hungry by eating and controlling my diet. Suicide conditions and preconditions are neither static nor predictable in how they affect people. Rather, perhaps it would help to revisualize the possible non-linear trajectory, if you will, of such policy discourse.

According to environmental philosopher Irene Klaver, there is great promise in the "meandering" of one's discourse, including policy efforts. This meandering does not necessarily mean to go more slowly, although it can. It denotes a process of exploring tangential connectedness, and by my evaluation, makes way for the great triad of philosophical logic: deduction, induction, and abduction. Deduction is reasoning that moves from generals to particulars, induction is reasoning that moves from particulars to generals, and abduction is

[157] World Health Organization. "Suicide-India." 2021. Available from: https://www.who.int/india/health-topics/suicide.

reasoning that is able to accurately formulate engaging scientific hypotheses given nonlinear information.[158]

Through the paradoxes that one experiences (ex: the perceived paradox of health and disease cohabiting the same space), there lies the potential to upend the homogenizing models for one's relationships with nature, money, exchanges, experiences, etc.[159] This meandering process includes the active participation of farmers themselves in navigating this discourse. The democratization of this power landscape invites collaborative problem solving and integrative categorization of farmers' struggles.

Klaver also explains that "democratic decision-making in landscape development or restoration activities implies that neither authenticity nor expert opinions have the ultimate authority."[160] I would add one element to Klaver's words within the context of agricultural infrastructure to say that democratic decision-making in the "landscape" of diseases and cures follows this same logic. In this sense, the policy "expert" is not much of an expert at all without the consideration and participation of the farmer's existential knowledge of their own complex suffering. An educated person with a "bird's eye view" of the entire problem is not a real possibility. Additionally, Klaver explains that herein rests the promise that one may discover different ways to re-think, re-connect, re-build, and re-configure one's world.[161] It is paramount that this re-thinking, re-connecting, re-building, and re-configuring maintain the possibility for

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[158] For those unfamiliar with abductive reasoning in philosophy, consult Charles S. Peirce's 1901 *On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents, Especially from Testimonies* in conjunction with his 1903 Harvard Lecture "The Nature of Meaning."

[159] Klaver, Irene J. "Meandering and Riversphere: The Potential of Paradox." *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community,* no. 11. 2018.

[160] Klaver, Irene. "Authentic Landscapes at Large: Dutch Globalization and Environmental Imagination." *SubStance* 41:1 (2012): 106.

[161] Klaver, Irene J. "Meandering and Riversphere: The Potential of Paradox." *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community,* no. 11. 2018.

future changes as farming conditions also change. The future of the agricultural industry and infrastructure is one of adaptation and inclusivity.

The unsettling reality of this problem is that there is no real "cure" (at least in its traditional, linear sense) for farmer suicide. It is a perennial problem that precipitates out of the social failings of infrastructure and enterprise. There are only varying levels of mitigation and an ongoing effort to make/remake the infrastructural system that exacerbates these issues. While it is admittedly impossible to account for all of the variables present in farmer suicide, we can certainly change the artificial infrastructural system that society has created. The fabrication of such a system necessitates the possibility of its own undoing. If it was made, then it can be unmade or changed.

This may seem at first as if it does not allow for progress. Quite the contrary! Progress is often messy, roundabout, and uncertain in its movement. This does not mandate or encourage an abandonment of effective policy or innovation! In reconceptualizing how we view the problem of farmer suicide, we also necessarily reconceptualize the remedies for such problems. In this respect, the final chapter shows such possible remedies and reconceptualization through the lenses of decolonial and postcolonial philosophies. If we truly "reaps what we sow," then let us start from the ground up.

CHAPTER 5

PROMISED LAND, DECOLONIAL AND DEGROWTH OUTLOOKS

> *If nationalism secures itself by an appeal to the most private, democracy in its most convenient and ascertainable form is secured by the most trivially public universal—each equals one. That flimsy arithmetic, unprotected by rational choice, can also be manipulated by nationalism. I am not convinced that the story of human movement to a greater control of the public sphere is necessarily a story of progress.*
>
> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Decolonial theory and degrowth theory are two promising fields that offer openness to the struggles and sufferings of farmers. On the one hand, decolonial theory has been circulating and producing work in the academy ever since the popularity of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* took hold quite some time ago. While Said was explicit in that his sense of "ideological fiction" applied to relationships between the Middle-East and the West, its formal structure can be applied to other colonialist relationships as well.[162] On the other hand, degrowth theory is a fairly recent development with contemporary scholars placing its genesis around the early 2000s.[163] It will not be enough for farmers, academics, or policy-makers to merely co-opt the frameworks used by decolonial or degrowth theorists. This is not a "one size fits all" model. Real positive change to the agricultural infrastructural system and to the well-being of farmers cannot be so top-heavy. For the purposes of this dissertation, decolonial theory is treated as theoretically synonymous with post-colonial theory in its logical presentation.

The context-specific ethical implications (asking the w-questions, who, what, when, why, whereas qualifiers for the specificity of thinking) and the "bottom-up" framework of decolonial

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[162] Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, Inc., [1979] 1994. p. 321.

[163] Kallis, Giorgos et al. "Research on Degrowth." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 43:4.1-4.26 (2018). p. 4.2.

thinking mitigates the success of such a blanket co-opt.[164] In this way, decolonial theory stirs up and dismantles linear efficiency paradigms that depend on little to no long-term change. On the surface, it may appear to the reader that the name "degrowth" invokes a kind of stasis and stagnancy. Through the possibilities created by degrowth utopias, this need not be the case for farmers and farming infrastructure (for in part, degrowth theory is a type of utopian form).[165] In policy circles, "utopia" has become a bit of a dirty word lately, connoting tones of inappropriately exaggerated goals or a waste of taxpayer dollars. The utopian aims of degrowth models are in actuality achievable and practical in the sense that their precipitating actions can catalyze systemic change. Thus, this change is indirectly caused rather than directly caused. The promised possibility of such utopian visions can create real, workable transition pathways to a more sustainable and compassionate future.

I take a moment to acknowledge the limitations of academic scholarship, as it contributes to such fields as decolonial and degrowth thinking. I would be remiss not to include such a discussion given its prominence in both fields. The institutions and repositories of "the academy," taken in its broad epistemological sense, are colonial and imperialistic in their nature.[166] That is, research, as such, takes thought from others and reshapes it to the subsequent author's needs and wants. To be sure, there is a thorough process of citation and giving credit where credit is due. The academy could not exist as it is today without this process, despite popular discussions about a "post-truth" world, the ambivalence of "it is just their point of view,"

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[164] Mignolo, Walter D. and Walsh, Catherine E. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2018 p. xvi.

[165] Kallis, Giorgos et al. "Research on Degrowth." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 43:4.1-4.26 (2018). p. 4.18.

[166] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1988. pp. 275-281

or a perceived landscape of equally weighted opinions. Despite this truth, this does not remedy the fact that the original author has no say in how their work evolves outside of their hands.

When people talk about the "liberal arts" or "philosophy as an art," this is what is meant. Philosophers create objects of study, whether these are material or theoretical, and these objects have originally intended purposes and boundaries. Once these objects of study are released into the world to other academics, they rarely resemble their original forms. Like a work by Rafaello Sanzio or Mary Cassatt that has traveled around from museum to museum, those interpreting the work within their own lived context have a great deal of room to stray from the original. There may be common foundational elements, but the complexity and nuance of such a piece is necessarily different across place and time.

There is nothing inherently "bad" about this relationship, in itself. It is simply the nature of living and working with an inexact discipline. Having said this, one does need to take great care, in the arts as well as the sciences, not to appropriate the ideas or frameworks of others in the name of "development" or "progress." It is critical not to speak for the lived realities of those other than ourselves. To some, this point may seem obvious or even trivial. It is a philosophical statement and one that I wish were more commonly accepted than it is. I bring this to the reader's attention because such a philosophical statement is a central tenet of decolonial theory and degrowth theory.

Academic institutions have a troubled history of silencing the praxis of those that do not fit orthodoxy or go through the traditional institutions of power. To reiterate a previous point, we are speaking and working *with* the narratives of farmers and supporting data rather than speaking *for* and consequently erasing the sovereign relationships with land and life discussed in the previous chapters. This is the primary reason why this dissertation has aimed at illuminating the

infrastructural *atmosphere of suicide* (i.e., its conditionality) among farmers rather than speaking on behalf of their experiences. An academic exercise of this category is both a construction and deconstruction of the system as it relates to the individual.

We can do our best to decrease the influence of biases and such; however, without a broader awareness of infrastructure, this alone can do very little to banish the academic demons of "the Oriental," "backwards living/thinking," "underdeveloped peoples," "savage lifestyles," "basic living," etc. These poisonous conceptions live in the brick walls of libraries, reflect off of the granite tiles of administrative buildings, and dance on our tongues via university core curricula. It will require a constant, concerted critical effort to overcome them.

The spoils of research can be much the same as the spoils of war. The victor (the author) has unilateral control over the defeated (the research and ideas that are taken to repurpose) and to what extent these sources can speak and act.[167] It is because of this inherently oppressive process that decolonial and degrowth ideas, such as those included in this chapter, simultaneously inspire the reader to change their actions on their own accord and draw critical awareness to their individual situatedness within the larger infrastructure. While this does not necessitate a compositional change on-the-whole by this logic, it does provide a fruitful opportunity for a brighter future.

Frameworks that offer authoritative models in themselves, "from the top town," as it were, simply feedback into a system of epistemological oppression that decolonial theory spends a great deal of time dismantling. Virtually every public figurehead today who acknowledges such oppressive relationships chants the mantra, "We must do better" in some form or another. This is

[167] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1988. pp. 283-308.

a good and noble beginning for such efforts, but it is also important to follow-through with praxis that formally changes such a system.

This is not to say that academics should stop doing research in the academy. For one reason or another, I find this a common knee-jerk response by those who do not wish to acknowledge their own academic and colonial privilege. It is concerning to me that so many academics today buy-in to the power of "cancel culture" and appeal to "political correctness" as a kind of weakness or misology. When at their best, movements like these are about acknowledging the privilege of one's own position and doing one's best to mitigate that privilege while also providing in-depth, pointed argumentation. It is in no way a call to stop academic inquiry in the service of uneducated opinion or mass conformity.

Rather, this is saying that we can recognize the limitations and boundaries of our intellectual pursuits as well as the consequences and outcomes associated with accumulation of knowledge. To know more is to take more, necessarily so. I would like to encourage the reader to stay away from the valuation of this epistemological activity (i.e., whether this accumulation of knowledge is "good" or "bad" at face value) and instead focus on the specific critical methodological points of such a procedure. The vast historical majority of western scholarship in the academy has been one that does not value or recognize such an awareness. This cycle of colonialist commodification and disciplinary blindness can be broken.

Decolonial Thought and Infrastructure Tilling

As far as decolonial theory goes, there are few decolonial scholars as prominent as Walter Mignolo. In a 2011 text *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Mignolo highlights five main trajectories of the global order that are shaping the global future. I suggest that all five of these global trajectories influence farming

practice and struggle in the United States and India. Briefly, Mignolo explains their content as the following:

1.) Dewesternization: This trajectory emphasizes East and Southeast Asia and was forecasted in *Clash of Civilizations* by Sam P. Huntington. It is not inherently anti-west. As the non-West modernizes, it is starting to reject forced historical paradigms. Dewesternization embraces the idea of development and includes conflictive coexistence of capitalistic structures.

2.) Rewesternization: Re-establishes the confidence that the rest of the world had in the United States (post-George W. Bush). Aims to reform relationships with China, Columbia, Brazil, Chile, etc. Rewesternization includes the re-orienting of racial positions and moves towards a capitalistic global order.

3.) Reorientation of the Left: The emergence of the "secular left" becomes more pronounced. This consequently provides an opening of dialogue between the Euro-American left and other centers of the left. There is a rejection of singular hegemonic solutions, instead in favor of many (possible) hegemonies. The formation of the World Social Forum occurs as a response to the World Trade Organization and World Bank's global dealings and influence.

4.) Decolonial Options (Mignolo preferred): Decoloniality means long-term processes involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power. This is different from decolonization, which refers to the decolonial actions of a specific period (ex: to expel a colonial power from lands via revolution).

5.) Spiritual Options: This trajectory involves decolonizing religion to liberate spirituality and calls attention to oppression through land control. Although there are some common themes here, such as seeking out Native American epistemologies, Mignolo admittedly "cannot go into any detail" with regard to the finer points of this movement.[168]

Mignolo prefers the decolonial option, not as a traditional discipline like philosophy, anthropology, sociology, etc. but rather what is best approximated as a praxis attitude towards critiquing already existing disciplinary boundaries and hegemony.[169] He is clear in stating that decoloniality cannot be cemented into academic disciplinary structures for it to do its work. In this way, decolonization describes situated instances of resistance and action, while decoloniality

[168] Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011. pp. 35-65.

[169] Ibid., p. 295.

describes the atmospheres or environments that make such actions possible. If we are true to the semiotic implications of Mignolo's approach, then there cannot be any degree programs in such decolonial areas. Decoloniality instead works to shift the fixed gaze of academic hyper-specialization to be aware of its own shortcomings.[170]

A common and contemporary rebuttal to these decolonial approaches is of concern here. There is a background tension between technology, the physical demands of life, and cultural tradition that saturates this work. It is a push and pull *ad infinitum*, if you will, between *animal laborans* and *homo faber* yet again. "Why not simply wait for technology to save us?" one may ask. "Why not invest all of our energy and time into technofixes for agricultural and infrastructural problems, including farmer suffering and suicide?" I would respond to these common and relevant questions in the following three ways.

First, I do not think it makes sense to abandon technological inventions that serve niche community needs. There is indeed a level of technophobia present in quite a lot of agricultural infrastructure literature. However, many pro-technocrats have misidentified and misattributed this fear, as its true manifestation (i.e., fear of colonization rather than technology itself) is masked behind the layers of neoliberal technological advancement and enterprise. Both Vandana Shiva's and Gandhi's work have fallen under this mischaracterization, as has the work of others who have voiced cultural shifts in agriculture.

Similarly, the dichotomous assumption made by pro-technocrats to my position is that I necessarily find technological contributions abhorrent or some form of Pandora's Box. I do not

[170] This may remind the reader of theory from Jean Paul-Sartre and Michel Foucault, who developed notions of the "gaze" as it relates to social awareness, power, and freedom. For Foucault, this gaze takes a more medical character and is a central part of diagnosis. For Sartre, this gaze forms a triangulation between self, other, and observer. See Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* or Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* for more on this concept as it may relate to the psyche.

view technology in such a way. Rather, I have a respectful distrust of it when it comes to globalizing agricultural systems. I hold this distrust out of witnessing how difficult it can be to divest from technological implementation and power dynamics once one "buys-in" to such a system. Again, this is not to say that it is *impossible* to do so, but it can certainly be *extremely difficult* for those who find themselves with less influence than Bayer/Monsanto, Nutrien, Tyson Foods, John Deere India, etc. In the United States, the commonly broadcasted response to corporate power and control is to boycott, vote, and protest. Sometimes, these peaceful measures work. In other areas of the world, it is not nearly this simple. Technology has tremendous potential to help struggling and starving populations, this is true. However, it also has tremendous potential to wipe out ways of life that are at the cultural heartstrings of rural areas. These ways of life, which may be categorized as "indigenous" but not necessarily so, have importance despite their inefficiency compared to many mainstream western utilitarian standards.

As far as policy implementation goes, it is a compositional fallacy to assume that niche cases justify widespread changes in farming methods (as has historically been the case in mega-scale farming both in the U.S. and India). For example, if a community is extremely Vitamin-A deficient and requires the intervention of genetically modified organisms to meet their dietary needs (in the short-term!), then this intervention likely makes sense.[171] The key point is to provide such niche aid in a way that does not bottom out the infrastructure and cultural import of the area while also creating a network of dependency.

Second, if "we" wait around or bide time for technofixes, who is the "we" that is doing

[171] This is particularly so with the Golden Rice project. While the intervention of such a project in Vitamin-A deficient communities was lauded as a medical success, the infrastructural consequences of the project created crop-dependency in communities where such resource availability became uncertain. I mention this not to condemn such projects in totality but to draw attention to long-term infrastructure consequences from short-term policy successes.

the waiting? It certainly is not the farmers themselves, as they do not have the luxury of stopping their production with such high demand structures in place. Their suffering continues alongside the whirring cogs of current agricultural infrastructure. If it is the consumer that is waiting for such fixes, then what is the *telos* or end-purpose of such an activity? It seems this frames the farmer's suffering and labour, yet again, into a commodified abstraction, to be dealt with by utilitarian means when it is convenient for the public to do so. Further, there is a yet stranger possibility of who the "we" is that waits for such technofixes, and this possibility shakes me deeply. It is the system itself that waits, in total abstraction of the agency of both farmers and consumers. If this is what lies "through the looking glass" of technocratic futures in agriculture systems, degrowth and decoloniality will be needed even more than they already are.[172]

Third, farmers do not own the means of production to such technofixes. This technocratic approach would likely further alienate farming communities from what little of their labour has not already been abstracted for the sake of the neoliberal system. Is it currently *possible* for farmers to own the means to such production and technofixes? Well, yes, technically speaking. Is it a *practical* and *equitable* process to procure the ownership of such means to production and technofixes? No, it is not.

Mignolo envisions a new kind of cosmopolitanism in which the colonial aims of the past are no longer aligned with such globalizing projects. Specifically,

> If cosmopolitan ideals are maintained in and for the twenty-first century, cosmopolitanism shall be accountable for its crimes: the very foundation of cosmopolitanism, as envisioned by Kant and explained by Toulmin, was complicitous with the formation of European imperial powers and of European expansion in America, Africa, and Asia, as well as with the continuation of Europe in the United States, as Hegel was anticipating. To maintain cosmopolitan ideals, we (all those who engage in

[172] This is a reference to Lewis Carroll's 1871 *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* in which despite Alice's clear vision through the mirror into another world, logic is reversed, time functions strangely, and life itself begins to make little sense. Alice's vision betrays her, and she enters a world completely different than what she anticipated.

> this project) need to decolonize cosmopolitanism, which means moving toward a decolonial cosmopolitan order no longer modeled on the law of nature discovered by science, but from various models of conviviality that Western cosmopolitanism suppressed. Cosmopolitanism cannot be a top-down global order, nor can it be the privilege of 'frequent travelers' and tri-continental subjects. Cosmopolitanism shall be thought out in relation to a heterogenous historico-structural conception of history and society... and world order, rather than in a unilinear narrative of history and a hierarchical organization of society.[173]

Here, Mignolo refers to a colonial cosmopolitan order that is quite similar to the history Hannah Arendt highlighted. The "law of nature" in western cosmopolitanism is twofold: one, it possesses a philosophical and sociological argument for development systems which becomes synonymous with evolution (from Kant to Marx); two, while not quite the same as fate, this Hegelian notion of cosmopolitanism is in part deterministic in its form. If knowledge is slowly progressing, linearly, towards a more perfect future, then it follows that different societies will be in different places on this linear model. These two aspects have been regular, historical sources of justifications for war and colonial invasion. In any form colonialism takes, from within a colony or from without, from the borders of theory or practice, these sources of justification can be ended.

Degrowth and Utopia

The term "degrowth" first appeared in 1972 as "décroissance" under French Intellectual André Gorz.[174] This notion entailed senses of balancing the earth's function and well-being with the industrial costs of production, expansion, etc. Eventually, this term sparked activism through the early 2000s, becoming more and more popular. Giacomo D' Alisa et al. define degrowth today as:

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[173] Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011. p. 270.

[174] D'Alisa, Giacomo et al. *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era.* New York: Routledge, 2014. p. 1.

> Degrowth signifies, first and foremost, a critique of growth. It calls for the decolonization of public debate from the idiom of economism and for the abolishment of economic growth as a social objective. Beyond that, degrowth signifies also a desired direction, one in which societies will use fewer natural resources and will organize and live differently than today. 'Sharing', 'simplicity', 'conviviality', 'care' and the 'commons' are primary significations of what this society might look like.[175]

Upon first reading this, I think most neoliberal minds today would be quick to push back. After all, nearly everything one interacts with in today's globalizing world is framed in terms of traditional economic conceptions of growth. Countries regularly monitor and report positive spikes in GDP as indicators of national success and countrywide well-being, retirement portfolios depend heavily on stock increases, the "forecast" of restrictions on such growth scares away the eager investor, etc. While these ideas *may* be associated with improvement, this association is not a necessary condition to conceptualizing growth. D' Alisa et al. are also quick to counter by stating degrowth is not the same as negative GDP. Rather, it is a matter of descaling and changing the social goals of economics and production.[176] A framework of this kind often demands change from within the system rather than destroying the system to start anew.

This is not a change that can happen overnight. By this, I do not mean that it cannot happen because of lack of effort or feasibility. As degrowth scholars Ellwood and Brazier note in their 2014 book *No-Nonsense Guide to Degrowth & Sustainability*, society today is hostage to GDP growth; this hostage situation can produce direct, negative consequences for others if slowed down in the wrong ways (such as in the 2008 crash).[177] So, a degrowth approach to agricultural infrastructure and farmer suicide would have to occur through stages of transition

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[175] Ibid., p. 3.

[176] D'Alisa, Giacomo et al. *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era.* New York: Routledge, 2014. p. 5.

[177] Ellwood, Wayne and Brazier, Chris. *No-Nonsense Guide to Degrowth & Sustainability*. Oxford: New Internationalist, 2014. p. 20.

instead of fast, complete overhaul of the system. While I am not certain of what all these stages would look like down the road, it is clear that status quo cannot be maintained. The content of this dissertation is a practical starting point for what will likely be a decades-long journey.

Ellwood and Brazier also discuss the impracticality of adopting an austerity approach to economy as it relates to growth models, as this austerity approach has been a common knee-jerk reaction against unfettered neoliberal capitalism (i.e., austerity as focusing all efforts on decreasing the deficit and decreasing spending).

> These concerns dominate economic policy in G20 nations and across the OECD, even though there is zero proof that austerity leads to growth. Just the opposite: it appears both harsh and ineffective medicine, disturbingly similar to the 19th-century practice of bleeding a patient to cure disease.[178]

Consequently, the economy cannot be brought to a screeching halt, and the economy also cannot be allowed to continue its current course. It is truly a "Catch-22" situation in which there are no good, clear options. The degree of wickedness inherent in this wicked problem rears its head once again for all to see.

As such, the meanings and uses of other buzzwords like "development" and "autonomy" can also change to escape their historical associations with western capitalist growth models (and consequently the inequality and violence that emerges from such relationships). One possible way to reframe decolonial notions of autonomy in-line with degrowth models is through the incorporation of Gandhi's sense of communal unity. Self-rule logically instills a shift in scale in which the tensions between individuality, citizenship, and community are explored. While Gandhi did not have a fleshed-out textual explanation of citizenship, I believe one can be extrapolated from his overall framework, as was highlighted in Chapter 3 of this work. This

[178] Ellwood, Wayne and Brazier, Chris. *No-Nonsense Guide to Degrowth & Sustainability*. Oxford: New Internationalist, 2014. pp. 158-9.

different view of citizenship or communal identity is one that is shared between Shiva, Gandhi, decolonial thinking, and degrowth thinking.

The United States and India have conceptualized debt incorrectly as it relates to farming and farmers. Debt is a moral obligation to others, and it only sometimes takes the form of monetary compensation.[179] Often, as has been alluded to many times in this dissertation, debt burdens can take the form of "intangible" inequality and unevenness. In this way, farmers are not indebted to the agricultural system. Inversely, everyone else is indebted to the farmer, to the character and virtue of their unrelenting work in the face of adversity, the pain of their existential suffering, to their beaten and bruised bodies, and the ongoing burden of their neglected well-being. Generally speaking, I do not think people are ready to settle this kind of debt with farmers. The United States and India are not even *socially equipped* to foot this kind of bill. However, this can change, from the bottom-up. Mental healthcare can be expanded, the discourse around suicide can become more nonlinear and adaptive, and the totalizing abstraction of the agricultural system can be altered.

There are many positive aspects of contemporary life that were built on utopian ideals. The United States of America was theorized under an imagined utopia away from England. Athenian democracy, within the context of an ancient republic, was also built on utopian goals that emphasized artistic expression, lyricism, craftsmanship, politics, etc. Universities are premised on a foundation of utopian free thinking and exchange of ideas. The United Nations Human Rights Council exists to highlight moments of grave injustice because of utopian aims of inclusion and an end to international suffering. Ben & Jerry's ice cream exists because of utopian creativity and ingenuity! This is not to say that these examples are free of conflict or difficulty

[179] D'Alisa, Giacomo et al. *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era.* New York: Routledge, 2014. p. 156.

but rather that the theoretical framework encourages peaceful transitions of power, new ways to conceptualize the world as the world changes, and healthy confrontation.

There are also some negative examples of the consequences of utopian visions. Fascism can gain a foothold in the masses through utopian promises. Imperialistic wars have been justified on utopian grounds of future peace and prosperity. Oppressive forms of patriotism find their way into politics through discourse of utopian unification, as if fewer viewpoints would equate to greater compassion and widespread realization of purpose. A line of pharaohs' utopian views of empire and legacy demanded the slavery necessary to build the Giza pyramids. The list goes on further and further.

As a consequence, utopias are a discursive tool with which to make sense of the world, both present and future. Just as *swaraj* is constructive and deconstructive in its nature, so too are utopian ideals constructive and deconstructive in theirs. The promise is to create an environment of possibility and change, without much to speak of in terms of guarantees. If a thoughtful and critical praxis is maintained, a great deal of good can result.

In this vein, there are a few concepts in degrowth literature that coincide with the decolonial work from Walter Mignolo, and these concepts possess a great deal of promise for untangling the conceptual machinery of agricultural infrastructure and abstract labour. To examine this common ground, I turn to the work of Columbian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez and Chilean anthropologist Juan Francisco Salazar. Since farmers are quite literally tethered to their soil, the discussion of land and epistemology that these authors provide is crucial for synthesizing the previous chapters.

Synthesis and Soil

Sticking with the theme of this work, I would like to coin a theoretical blend of

decolonial theory and degrowth theory as "infrastructure tilling."[180] As with tilling soil, decolonial theory and critique readies the "field" of thought as fertile and ready to bear the fruits of its labours (non-abstractly so!). Old thoughts and ideas get stuck, compacted further by often-tread pathways, and resist the need for cultivation. Spending too long in the same way of thinking can deplete the ingenuity and adaptability of the mind, much like an over farmed monoculture plot of land is depleted of its micro and macro nutrients that are necessary for change and adaptation.[181] It is time to turn the soil of farmer suicide's mental landscape.

The diachronicity of infrastructure tilling resists the modern philosophical, colonial notion of what some have called the "zero point." Columbian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez highlights such a concept in *La Hybris del Punto Cero*. Castro-Gómez states,

> Este punto absoluto de partida, en donde el observador hace *tabula rasa* de todos los conocimientos aprendidos previamente, es lo que en este trabajo llamaremos la hybris del punto cero.[182]

This roughly translates into a "zero point" philosophy in which the past knowledge of concepts, work, and histories are erased in favor of a pseudonymous "new" European colonialist view. A fresh, new, original beginning is sketched in such a fashion that many do not even know the lineage from which it comes. While the subject matter of Castro-Gómez's work is historical Nueva Granada, the same theoretical framework applies to farmer marginalization in India and the United States. The knowledge of farmers, sometimes indigenous sometimes not, is erased in

[180] I adopt this terminology via inspiration from Ancient Greek conceptions of *kyklos* (cycles). These cycles were conceptualized as a necessary part of lived political life and could include governmental structures as well as daily life. For example, see Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Politics* for instances of the governmental nature. *Kyklos* were not deterministic or fatalistic other than the fact that their process was seen as inevitable in itself. In this way, the *telos* of such a concept draws attention to a world in flux. Through each iteration of a cycle rests the potential to break the trajectories of past cycles, as one does when tilling land. This also dovetails with Vandana Shiva's critique of "monocultures of the mind," discussed in Chapter 3.

[181] Shiva, Vandana and Berry, Wendell. *The Vandana Shiva Reader*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 2014. pp. 71-113.

[182] Castro-Gomez, Santiago. *La Hybris del Punto Cero*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana: Bogotá. 2005. p. 25.

the same manner in favor of more systematically optimized methods.

Policy on and the treatment of farmer suicide, within the traditional dichotomy of diseases and cures, follows this same kind of zero-point logic. Further still, this policy and treatment quickly increments such a zero point, via the agricultural infrastructure system and abstracted labour. One week, a farm in a rural corner is highlighted for its hardship and potential suicide issues. The next week, public attention has moved elsewhere, often to focus on the broader implications to the agricultural system. Granted, the bigger picture is undoubtedly an important piece to this entire scenario, but it cannot be allowed to silence the experiences of individuals and families. Such a thing minimizes farmer struggle and creates a new point of orientation centered on the experience and expertise of others. Like a doctor treating an inconvenient rash, farmer suicide is approached as a rare exception rather than an increasing trend resulting from the infrastructure. The discourse around the health and well-being of farmers themselves is left behind in favor of a constantly renewing, novel health of the system. This system is western-dominant in its character, as is also the case in Castro-Gómez's theory. Furthermore, the health of the system is condemned to be novel, constantly remaking itself in every moment as the infrastructure's linear efficiency increases (by GDP standards that is).

There is another area of interest that couples nicely with theoretical degrowth material and Castro-Gómez's zero point. In Salazar et al.'s 2020 book *Thinking with Soils: Material Politics and Social Theory*, the links between "regenerative agriculture" and politics are examined. Regenerative agriculture exists as an attempt to reinvigorate soil diversity and fertility in a global landscape that is depleting the richness of farming grounds. Salazar et al. pose the following possibility,

> Perhaps soils preempt a form of politics in which object and subject do not exist in ontologically separate domains...the invisibility of soil in contemporary social and

> political theory can be traced back to a range of sociohistorical separations that have transformed soil into a taken-for-granted, invisible infrastructure for modern cities agriculture, and markets….[183]

Logically speaking, it is not clear that soils preempt this politics in themselves. But it is clear that farmers and soils, as a linked force, preempt this politics. Like the soils that Salazar et al. argue are invisible or disappearing, so are the farmers that live through soil. Again, there is a clear connection with Arendt here. Perhaps part of the reason that the public and policymakers take such soil for granted is because of a lack in thoughtful, critical action in the *vita activa*. It is also not clear to many how soil and land differ in today's globalizing environment. Is it a matter of epistemological reframing? Is it a matter of local politics and policy? Is the relationship of farmers to soil different from farmers to land? What needs to be brought "into the light" of critical thought? While some thrive standing on the shoulders of giants, a great many more thrive standing on the shoulders of farmers, mid-swing with their pitchforks and hammers. This area of scholarship deserves more attention and engagement.

Currently, there is a danger of soil commodification as private holders neglect their land, which in turn affects the agricultural infrastructure on the whole. This phenomenon has already happened with the commodification of water as climate change concerns and potable water difficulties continue around the globe. Soil (or land?) are likely next. Rightfully, Salazar et al. question whether such a soil commodification even makes theoretical sense in a capitalist system. In order to successfully create such a soil commodity market, soil and land would have to be abstracted into one another, thus detaching them from their ecosystem specificity.[184] While Salazar et al. argue that soil *may be treated* as a commodity, they maintain that it *is not really* a

[183] Salazar, Juan Francisco et al. *Thinking with Soils: Material Politics and Social Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020. p. 17.

[184] Ibid., pp. 56-7.

commodity and thus possesses some kind of inherent resistance to capitalistic endeavors. I do not think this distinction serves a practical purpose, unless ontology of soil is inextricably linked to the people who use it.

I would counter Salazar et al. by showing these authors the state of affairs of farmers and farmer suicide in the United States and India. Western agricultural infrastructure and systems have already abstracted their constituent members. *The people who live with the soil are killing themselves*. The zero point has shifted, and it is no longer oriented in arguments of ontological accuracy. It is not a matter of *when* or *if* soil will be treated as a commodity. It has already happened within the context of the larger system. Soil is one of many abstracted zero points constantly repositioned and remade in the service of a "healthier" dehumanizing and alienating infrastructural mechanism.

The kinds of critical questions raised by Castro-Gómez and Santiago et al. are emblematic of the kind of philosophical inquiry needed in precarious times like these. What of the mundane and its seemingly inconsequential links? Dis-ease, hyphenated here to draw attention to the loss of stasis or comfort, explodes into many more sociohistorical connections and questions. What is implied in farmer struggle as a patriotic sacrifice? What happens to autonomy? What happens to sovereignty? What happens to the broader *eudaimonia* of individuals and their families?

Furthermore, what possibilities for future narratives and myths are present? How can the colonial nature of the current agricultural infrastructure be changed, if it can at all? It is my hope that philosophers will recognize how well-positioned the discipline is for the "problem" of farmer suicide. This dissertation is but one small step towards a full philosophical investigation and illumination of this complex sociopolitical phenomenon. Both interdisciplinary and

transdisciplinary approaches will be needed if we are to re-account for the sovereignty and well-being of farmers.

CONCLUSION

This work began with the thesis that every empirical manifestation of suicide maintains an axiological concept of suicide. This was argued in such a way that concepts and lived realities are inseparable, both in their categorizations and in their valuations. The "atmosphere" of suicide expands beyond economic concerns, and the prevailing dichotomy of cures and diseases is a detrimental framing of both farmer struggle and infrastructural failings.

In the current agricultural, infrastructural models in the United States and India, the abstraction of labour has complexified farmer suicide issues in such a way that the "health" of agricultural and economic systems has substituted for the actual health (and *eudaimonia*) of real, living people. This phenomenon in itself is not inherently new, and there is a wealth of scholarship since the 1970s critiquing the failings of capitalistic systems within the context of neoliberalism. The shift in discourse, vocabulary, and praxis that I suggest is paramount regarding farmer suicide as a complex, philosophical, sociopolitical phenomenon. Nonlinear remedies that include a reframing of the sovereignty and autonomy of farmers themselves are crucial to any positive lasting change in this crisis. As part of the human condition, the dynamic between *homo faber* and *animal laborans* within the context of the *vita activa* can be revisited in this light.

Through the examples of U.S. farmer suicide issues in Chapter 2, it is clear that farmers in the United States are being subsumed by the larger agricultural infrastructure. This is creating greater and greater degrees of economic disparity as well as existential anguish. While this is not true for *all* farmers, it is common enough in the United States to have drawn regular intervention from the CDC as well as the National Farmers Union. As a consequence of this attention, suicide is being labelled as an epidemic.

While the gesture towards the wide-ranging effects of suicide is generally helpful, this gesture is inseparable from the complex historical and political history of "epidemics" as a discourse. This discourse of epidemics carries with it a medical history and politics of the disease and cure dichotomy. Framing farmer suicide as such is severely limiting to policy possibilities and reduces farmer struggle to a pathological anomaly. These pathways are detrimental to farmers and have increased in their degree of severity following the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the examples of Indian farmer suicide issues in Chapter 3, it is clear that like farmers in the United States, Indian farmers are also being subsumed by the larger agricultural infrastructure. Such an activity is a utilitarian pathway broadcasted as a kind of patriotic act for the betterment of the state. The *Hindutva* political vision of India's current government has blended religious, political, and liberal tenets in a way that indirectly forces farmers to sacrifice their bodies and lives in the name of a "Hindus first" or "One India" movement. Farmers are denied their sovereignty and autonomy in the service of the greater good of the State. The situation becomes even more complex considering both the influences of outer, colonialist pressure and inner, institutionalized colonialism. In terms of India's farming population, the burdens of this state of affairs are not distributed equally among age, gender, caste, etc. As with the United States, these dynamics have also increased in their degree of severity following the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 4 elaborated on the disease and cure dichotomy. Through the work of George Canguilhem, regulation theory, and Achille Mbembe, the philosophical and existential boundaries between disease and health were outlined. These boundaries were compared to suicide discourse so that Canguilhem's analysis could serve as a critical lens to better understand the layers of this complex sociopolitical phenomenon. Power and knowledge imply one another

and are affect the overall workings of the agricultural infrastructure in both the United States and India. Sovereignty, taken as the ability to command life and death, illustrates the difficult philosophical and existential state of affairs in which farmers are required to choose life for the population at the expense of their own. This has resulted in a necropolitics in which suicide is the last attempt to regain such diminished sovereignty and communal identity.

The final chapter of this work suggested the concept "infrastructure tilling" in which old concepts, ideas, and habits have to be shaken loose of their compacted conceptual "soil." This was juxtaposed with the oppressive "zero point" of colonial frameworks, which has created a discourse and vocabulary of obsolescence and backwardness in order to subjugate praxes unorthodox to westernized linear efficiency models. While slowing down consumption and production may provide some relief, these are only a couple of pieces in the larger picture.

De-growth theory often includes a slow-down in consumption, and this slow-down is always coupled with a shift in scale and discourses of power. The often-traveled paths of the agricultural infrastructure are clear and comfortable. Critical inquiry and innovation are arduous. To this effect, decolonial, ground-up thinking requires a daring challenge to such colonial trajectories. Additionally, de-growth thinking allows for the logical shift in scale and time necessary to perform such a challenge. A farmer's connection to land and soil is not divorced from the politics enacted upon them.

Following these summary points, there are three main relationships that need to change for the atmosphere of suicide to change for the better. First, the relationship between the consumer and farmers can become more transparent and can alter in terms of its scale. Consumers, especially those in so-called "developed" parts of the world like the United States, consume more per capita than any other population on the planet. Farmers cannot keep up with

this kind of demand, not to mention the strain on natural resources that this level of consumption commands.

Second, the relationship between policymakers and farmers can change to be more equitable and humanistic. Abstract labour, in the service of maintaining autonomy and health of the economic, agricultural system can be restructured to allow for the revitalization of farmers themselves. Without this restructuring, farmers are at risk of further abstraction and marginalization. The current farming infrastructure failings in the United States and India have created a kind of necropolitics that attempts to re-articulate farmer sovereignty and livelihood where such notions have been severely diminished. The measures of value can be challenged and broadened to deeper categories than numerical value, gross domestic product, etc.

Third, once consumers become aware of these dynamics, they can pressure policy makers to enact positive lasting change and to hold them to their word, democratically speaking. If all of these elements are taken together, there is a chance that farmers can be more supported by the system that they have given blood, sweat, tears, and life to maintain. Future climate change will only add further layers of obscurity to this predicament, and time is precious. Philosophy has a great deal to contribute to this area of research, so let us begin here.

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